THE GOLDEN WIND

TAKASHI OHTA & MARGARET SPERRY

Charles Boni PAPER BOOKS *New York*

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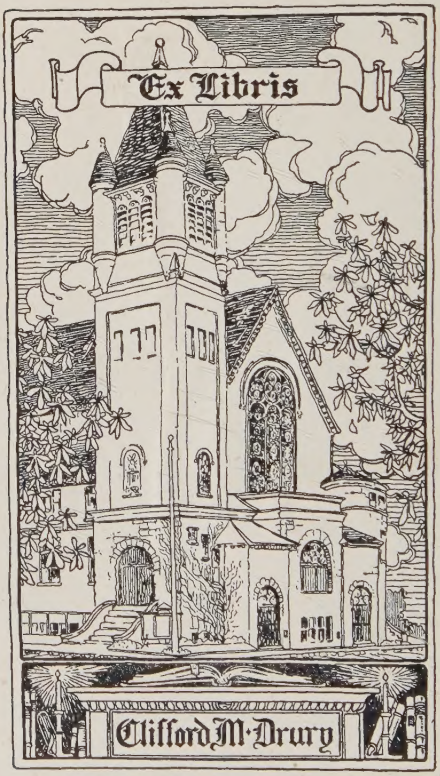

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☆ TAKASHI OHTA ☆

AND

MARGARET SPERRY

1929

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THE GOLDEN WIND

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INTRODUCTION

A Japanese youth of a prominent family, banished from the Empire because of the political activities of his father, took refuge in China. There he served under a Chinese general of the revolutionary army, and later joined the bandits of Northern Manchuria. This is the basis for THE GOLDEN WIND*; the young Japanese tells of his adventures. And because of an unusual collaboration this actuality has been given a deep meaning and a wide scope.*

THE GOLDEN WIND *has an external and an internal interest, and each in a high degree. Externally it gives a panorama of China during a momentous period in her history—a period that our newspapers make daily comment on; internally it is the story of a quest for something that will give meaning to a life in exile.*

All that surface reconciliation that is ordinarily given to our lives through a traditional pattern furnished by a place in our own land, inherited duties, normal disciplines and attachments have been lost to the central personage in this book. Takawo Muto is an exile completely; he is a man not only outside his own country, but outside his proper destiny. The sort of image that is frequently used

in the narrative of his adventures gives us the effect of alienation—"Here Earth, immense, impersonal, rolled beneath a vast, uncaring sky." "Stillness descends; he feels himself lost; shipwrecked as on the shore of some forgotten star." He glimpses that beauty that is for him emblematic of the country of his soul, but to each of the three women who show an aspect of that beauty he must say farewell. His quest ends in the Temple of Mysterious Heaven. There, beside the images of tumultuous desire he learns that his quest is to be endlessly continued—"If you would come to the innermost stillness of the serene mind, ask that all may be taken from you."

Although we never lose the sense that the people in THE GOLDEN WIND *are of an alien race, and although all of them go through adventures that are exotic as far as our ordinary lives are concerned, we know that Takawo Muto's quest is for something in our own lives. And the names of the people, meaningless for us, are like the masks put on in certain plays to give a more certain meaning to the action. And these people whose histories we do not know are like children acting in a play and by their unstressed personalities giving all they do a fresher meaning. I find in* THE GOLDEN WIND *an imaginative and consistent pattern. The external scene is conveyed in a few brief descriptions.*

> *"Takawo had not observed that the guide had led him from the dense forest and they had come close to the river-bank and here was presented a bridge of exceeding age and carven from a single stone. At a little distance above this was a waterfall and to the music of its shattered waters, Takawo now placed his foot upon the archway of the rock."*

This might be from a Chinese print. By stylized description the authors give us the impression of an historic —perhaps of a sacred land. The women whom Takawo meets and takes farewell of—Lee, Nadja, Kay—hardly differ from each other: they might be the same woman seen in different situations: as Muto chances on one, then the other, then the third, there is an increasing intimacy. But they are there to remind him of a world that he is exiled from—each has a history that is like his own, for each has been torn from the simple things that make up normal fulfillment. We only glimpse each of these women, but we guess that each had in her unusual capacity for happiness, both to give and to receive it—and each is in bitter exile.

Padraic Colum

THE GOLDEN WIND

From the summit of Mount Tai the young man stood and gazed down past the precipitous way by which he had come and saw a world of yellow corn-fields, houses scattered at great distances from one another, and the Ki-Kou River, broad and slow, with rafts upon it sailing toward that sea that was beyond the compass of his eyes.

Fleeing from his beloved Nippon, he had crossed that sea. Surely it was plan, not accident, that had permitted his escape from prison! A month behind bars may cast shadows on the spirit, though honor and filial love make proud the heart.

The sea he'd crossed, and safely, but the past two months in China had weighed him with desolation. To the coolies with whom he'd labored and who in kindness had shared with him their small repasts of cucumbers and melons, he could not tell his tale. He dared not reveal himself, for betrayal of his name might bring desolation to those he loved, to those he left because he loved them ardently!

His eyes wandered to the far horizons. How unlike his native island of Go-Go was this wide expanse. Here earth,

immense, impersonal, rolled beneath a vast, uncaring sky. At home, rice-field, cherry tree and shrine were intimate with man; and the traveling eye was made tender by the sweetness and smallness of the scene.

From that beloved isle Takawo Muto was exiled, and through no fault of his.

Exiled. Alone. The silence of that high place sang to him; and its music was austere. If he could but hear the dawn-bell ring from the tower of his home, but to that home he could not return. As he gazed and dreamed of his tender life of boyhood, he became aware that the world below this high mountain was obscured slowly by a wave of gold that shut the valley from his view. The august voice of the wind came to him; across the plain it rolled, bringing with it myriads of grains of sand.

"The golden wind that comes up out of the Gobi Desert." Takawo spoke to his own self.

An hour passed; the tawny wave rolled into the west; the earth was clear once more, the air pure.

Takawo Muto, weary, for he had wandered many days on foot, found a sheltered place among the rocks and there lay down and slept. When he wakened, he heard the scuffling of animal feet upon the stones. A flock of sheep came toward him and behind them walked a man with white hair and beard who carried in his hand a staff. When he saw him, Takawo was reminded of his own Grandfather. He rose and tried to go toward the stranger, but he was lame and footsore, and so sat down and contented himself with watching the approach of the shepherd and his sheep.

The old man did not notice Takawo. The young man rose again and this time he was nimbler. At last the shep-

herd became aware of him and rested upon his staff, waiting for Takawo to come to him. Presently young Muto stood face to face with the venerable stranger, and as he looked upon the old man he remembered that in China only scholars and noblemen are permitted beards.

"This man must be a scholar, for so gentle are his eyes and his body slender. Surely to him it will be safe to show my letter!"

He tried to speak but no word came so he knelt before the shepherd and touched his hand. In doing this he gained a little courage. Among the few Chinese words he'd learned, he chose two: "Beloved Teacher." With these words Takawo addressed him and when the old man heard them, he put his hand upon the young man's head and bade him rise.

The stranger beckoned to Takawo to follow and they turned down the mountain, leaving the sheep to graze upon its top. They walked among the corn within the fields and crossed a bridge over a little stream, then came at last to a humble house with a thatch of straw. They entered and Takawo saw little furniture, many books and a collection of pipes. Before the corn-cob fire they sat the evening through and in silence, with the coming of the stars, they lay upon the floor and slept.

Next morning at sunrise the old man and the young man went to carry salt to the sheep upon the mountain. As they were once again returning toward the shepherd's cottage, Takawo's host began to speak and withal so simply that his guest could understand:

"I have hidden my face from all men, rejoicing in the solitude of the mountain more than in the chatter of villages. But you have need of me else I should not have

found you on the summit of Mount Tai. Reveal to me what is in your heart."

"Great Teacher, as I slept upon the stone my body was weary and my thought confused. I feared the future, knowing neither where to turn nor whither to go. But when I had slept and wakened, I found you!"

The old man put his hand upon Takawo's shoulder and with the other he raised the boy's face to his own:

"Your eyes are tender, your brow sensitive. Forever you will be exiled from the beauty that you love; if you will beware of lovely women and games of chance, you can go toward the west and there your life may bring you wisdom."

"At last I have found one to whom I may reveal this letter," explained Takawo.

His venerable host took the paper, read it slowly, and turning to him said:

"This letter will bring you into strange adventures from which wisdom may emerge. But never tarry long in one place and never attach affection to a single person, for you will fulfill yourself through exile and any other way of life will be treacherous to your true nature."

They had now come within sight of the old man's house and instead of turning toward it, the host said abruptly:

"There in the distance along the bank of that river moves a procession of men and horses. There you will find the man your Father speaks of in this letter. He is the hand of the Revolution, whereas Dr. Sun is the eye and heart. General Ko is a shrewd man of his time and his spirit is as ambiguous as the bat. Learn from the General all that is in your nature to learn; but do not become attached to any one of his household. For you, this is the way of virtue."

Without further words the old man turned and Takawo

walked forward a few steps. He was loath to leave his friend. He looked about. The Sage had started over the bridge of the little stream that ran near his house and he, too, had stopped and was looking back. Both men remained so for a few minutes and then the shepherd-scholar went toward his home.

Takawo walked rapidly in the direction of the river toward that pageant of men and horses that was winding slowly along the sloping bank.

An hour later Takawo Muto came up to the procession of General Ko. As he drew near it he was pushed away by a guard. Several times he tried to draw near the gun-sha carriage where he knew the master would ride; again and again the guard pushed him back. Still he persisted, walking as near the cavalcade as he could. From where he trudged in the dust he caught glimpses from time to time of the man who sat in the gun-sha. Childhood memories stirred in Takawo.

He was certain he had seen before that opulent figure now dressed in mandarin coat of black with brilliant embroideries. But the picture he recalled was a man wearing a queue and one knee raised, his great weight resting on the other as he smoked. But now the gorgeous figure in the carriage had his hair cropped and he sat regally with both knees straight before him. Nevertheless Takawo felt assured this was the same man who had visited his Father in their home in Nippon. Therefore he did not lose heart at the rebuffs of the guard but determined to follow in the General's train until he should arrive at his dwelling

where he might have better fortune in presenting his letter of introduction.

The rest of that day Takawo padded forward in the dust, walking at the rear of the cavalcade, and when they stopped for the night at a small village he slept near the door of the inn where the General and his soldiers took lodging.

"How can I expect to approach him," Takawo considered, "being shabby, covered with dust, and in a condition worse than the lowest coolie?"

But he determined to go on and so another day Takawo trudged behind the procession and at sunset they came to the city of Chio-Foo. The gates in the wall opened and two lines of soldiers awaited the General's entrance. Behind the men dressed in motley uniforms, the townspeople crowded, straining their eyes for a sight of their War Lord.

The procession made its way through the streets until they had reached the gates of the General's house. All passed within. Takawo alone was kept outside. It was no use for him to insist that he be brought into the General's presence. The more he insisted the more forcibly was he pushed back into the street.

But he did not lose heart; rather, he was without the courage to face what was before him if he failed.

Day after day young Muto went to the gates and spoke with different gate-keepers each time. Finally after a week had passed and once more he was refused admission, he pretended madness. The guards lost patience completely and arrested him.

At this moment the young man's heart was both joyful and afraid, for he did not know how long he might be kept

prisoner before being brought before the General; and yet this was perhaps his only chance of entering that house where his refuge lay.

The wooden gates swung open and before him Takawo saw a great house with walls of white upon a foundation of stone. Its black roof had an undulating line after the manner of Chinese temples; and the Ko family crest wrought in colored tiles was sunk within the walls on either side of the arched door. The steps that led to the entrance were broad. The path that divided the court-yard was bulwarked by old-fashioned cannon. On either side of the wooden gates through which Muto had entered were stone barracks from which came the sound of men.

The guard now brought Takawo into one of the barracks. Soldiers searched him, discovered the letter given him by his Father, took it from him. A messenger carried the communication to the General. Within the quarter-hour Takawo Muto was taken to the waiting-room in the General's dwelling. Judging from the interior of this building it must have been a temple-school, for the walls were spattered with ink and were gray with age.

As Takawo was looking about at the details of the office, the door opened. The man who had been riding in the gun-sha stood before him. The General now wore a long coat of red and gold and in his right hand he carried a decorated fan. His face was stupid-shrewd and his manner serene.

He came toward the youth, walking slowly and when he was close, addressed Takawo in Japanese:

"Are you the son of Lord Sumiwo whom I have awaited this long time? We had prepared everything for you at our home in Tein-Shin but because of war we have found

it necessary to move here. It is our good fortune that you were able to discover us. We shall provide you at once with food and with clothes. When you wish you may begin upon your career. I know well that your Father is a believer in the brotherhood of all men underneath the sun, whereas I have faith in the union of the Asiatic families. Nevertheless it is my wish that you feel at home within my house, and if you desire to study you may do so. If you would learn Christian piety you may attend the nearby Christian college; if you prefer to place yourself under a Chinese scholar that too may be accomplished with ease. If at times I may seem to neglect you it is because of the difficulty of the epoch when I must give my mind to matters of war. However, I think my Ladies of the Inner Room will compensate for my flaws in hospitality."

Indicating a young man who had entered quietly, the General continued:

"This young man is Mizuwo Kawai whom I have chosen to be your companion; you will find he is of your own nation and is an admirer and follower of your Father's principles. I have selected for you a room next his; perhaps you may entertain each other on long evenings. My private quarters are at the other end of the house and I shall tell my wives we have the pleasure of receiving you."

The General turned and left the room. The door into the corridor stood open and Takawo saw two Europeans walking toward the door and with them a Chinese gentleman dressed in western clothes. All were speaking English and for the first time young Muto sensed the present was pregnant with political events of no small consequence.

But Takawo's thoughts were soon turned toward his new friend, for the young Japanese began:

"As the General said, I am a follower of your Father. Indeed I have had the honor of meeting Lord Sumiwo many times upon his visits to Tokio. Because of my knowledge of Chinese, your Father recommended me to this post with General Ko, and I hope in time I shall become your Father's agent in this country. As for yourself I beg you to consider it is not wise to appear in the offices of this building. With all respect to the General, I do not think he realizes how dangerous it is for you to be seen here. Japanese and British authorities are searching for you and I have read certain newspapers in which your picture has appeared. In this house police agents constantly come and go. They will soon recognize you and I deem it best you remain as much as possible away from the public offices."

With considerable alarm Takawo noted this last remark.

His new companion went on: "It is now very near supper and when you have washed and dressed I shall take you to the dining-room. I must warn you that in these troublesome times our food is not plentiful. The General will dine with us and on the same fare. A strange man! He refuses to walk through the poor quarters of the city yet he partakes of the fare given the common soldiers. In the mess-hall you will see many strangers but I shall not introduce you, for I believe the General himself will say something about you to them."

They had stopped before a door and Kawai opened it. Muto entered and found himself in a small gray room the walls of which were covered with paper. A narrow army cot of American make filled one wall and over it was thrown a Chinese coverlet of exquisite design and workmanship. Takawo smiled as if a soft feminine hand had

touched him; he pleased himself by thinking those remote Ladies of the Inner Room might have sent this as a token of their welcome.

He washed and dressed quickly and from the arm of an ugly oaken chair he took the khaki uniform laid out for him. His companion was awaiting him in the corridor.

Together they turned their steps toward a door which when opened revealed a large room dominated by a table along which were seated about thirty men. The General occupied a large chair at the head of the board and a middle-aged man whom Takawo understood to be the Chief-of-Staff sat at the opposite end. General Ko still wore his mandarin coat of gold and scarlet and a few older men seated near him were in similar dress but of more sober coloring. For the most part those about the table wore khaki uniforms and here and there sat a gentleman in European frock-coat and striped trousers.

No sooner had the two Japanese entered than the General looked up as if for an explanation. Kawai bowed and spoke:

"We are sorry to be late but we have had the pleasure of discussing our native land and how beautiful it is there at this season of the year when the maples are turning scarlet. As we talked we were not aware of the flight of time."

The General acknowledged this excuse and then addressed the company:

"This stranger who has entered with Mr. Kawai is the son of a friend and he will remain with us until he can find a suitable career. Meanwhile consider him a member of our staff and household."

The two young Japanese seated themselves near the

far end of the board. Takawo enjoyed the incongruity of the table-setting: white oilcloth and large Chinese bowls of exquisite design; tin plates and cups of aluminum or porcelain elaborately decorated.

Now the General was turning to a young secretary in European dress: "What, Mr. Soo, have you accomplished to-day?"

Soo raised a delicate head and answered: "Master, I have practiced the ancient axiom of our diplomacy which says to love, not your neighbor but him who resides at a great distance from you, for in this way your neighbor will be caught between your two strengths and eventually do as you desire."

The General smiled slowly: "This technique may do well at times but it is still wiser to let one's boat ride with the tide of circumstance. To hold back and refuse to sail upon the flood of fate while you follow an ancient axiom may be a grave error. Consider the boatmen of the Yangtse River who take passengers with them to ride the whirlpools. The frail crafts are sucked down into the spinning waters until the men in them see nothing but the sky and the towering river. A boatman without skill fights the whirlpool but a clever oarsman will let his boat spin like a top, knowing that when it has been drawn down to the bottom, then he may with a shrewd turn of his oars send his craft to the surface, and in perfect safety. . . ."

At this moment a soldier appeared at the door and announced that fire-rockets had been seen in the southwestern sky.

The men rose from their chairs and followed the General who was the first to leave the hall.

Takawo looked toward his friend for an explanation.

"Fighting has begun again and at no great distance," was Kawai's whispered comment, when they, too, left the room.

As Takawo passed with Kawai along the corridor of the General's house, he found himself thinking of his host. Young Muto had noticed that General Ko ate little and he felt certain his august and ample body was not nourished on scant military fare. Takawo suspected the General's dining with his officers and secretaries was an excuse to discuss with them affairs of state and to impart to them his principles of military and diplomatic conduct. Muto wondered if before appearing in the hall his host did not partake of a generous repast in his own quarters. Of what nature these quarters were, Takawo was eager to discover, but he deemed it wise not to confess his thoughts to his companion. Instead he begged Mizuwo Kawai to take him into the city for a walk. This request was refused, his new friend pointing out that at the moment such an adventure might be dangerous since the town was under martial law.

"My greatest pleasure in the evenings," his companion went on, "is to go out upon that balcony of the house which overlooks the private living-quarters of the General. The illumination from these windows gleams within the pool in the garden; and above lit waters tall trees are still in leaf. From there we shall see his Hareem, across whose casements his ladies move, making silhouettes upon the panes."

"Do these ladies know nothing of the dangers of war that are so close at hand?"

"I am certain they do not, and that is why I find this garden beautiful and their silhouettes gracious. Their movements are soft and delicate; neither haste nor harm appears to touch them. Upon the battlefield not more than

fifty miles away men are dying. War has long legs and may run anywhere. But tell me, do you wish to sit upon the balcony though it is forbidden?"

"I do," said Takawo, "with you I am sure there is no danger."

Silently the two young men proceeded along the corridor, thence out upon a long balcony which extended the entire length of the house. They seated themselves upon the carven railing where the shadows from the trees were deepest and for several minutes watched in silence the passing of the silhouettes across the windows of the Hareem.

At last memory pricked Mizuwo:

"I cannot help but think of the revolving lanterns of our native land when I see through the overhanging branches of the trees those lovely shadows pass."

"I, too, think of those lanterns when I see the silhouettes move across the lights. In watching them I am overcome by a profound longing for home. It is strange that an emotion so strong can be awakened thus, for these shades seem to me so frail I can scarcely believe in the reality of the ladies' existence."

"You are perhaps fated to love shadows more than substance," Mizuwo remarked, "and perhaps . . ." but his words withered in his mouth, for at this moment the door of the Hareem opened and a large and opulent figure stepped into the garden. In the gleaming of light from the windows Takawo recognized the General. His lordship walked slowly toward the pool, raised his head and stretched his arms. A yawn was audible.

At this moment Takawo became aware of some secret

merriment in his friend and he was not surprised when Kawai whispered to him a poem:

"An incident in the life of a hero
May leave the lady with dreams;
But the hero stretches his arms
And finds nothing better to do
Than count the stars in the sky."

But even this whispering had reached the General's ear. His voice boomed out:

"Who is there?"

At once the young men were silent. Takawo felt Kawai's hand drawing him along the balcony in the direction of the window through which they had come. But they did not reach it, for presently some third unseen person grasped them by the sleeve and thrust them through a door into the corridor. When they looked about they heard no further sound and saw no face. For several moments they waited and then crept soft-footed to their rooms.

"Do not light your lamp but go to bed at once," Kawai whispered at Takawo's door. "This is a beginning whose end I am unable to foresee."

Next morning when young Muto was dressing, a soldier appeared at his door and invited him to the private-office of the General. There he found Mr. Kawai with an air as if he had dressed hastily. General Ko entered, arrayed in a black silk suit and Chinese slippers.

The General addressed Mizuwo Kawai; his tone was double-edged:

"You know well the punishment which entry into my private garden may bring, but because you had in your

company this young man, son of a beloved friend, I shall not mete out the penalty you deserve, for it might rest too heavily upon my guest's spirit. However, men who have not known the life of the soldier are mischievous. Therefore to-day I am sending you to the front."

Then turning to Takawo, he continued.

"You are young, and in spirit younger than your years, therefore I believe you still need the tenderness which women alone can give. For this reason and for yet another which has to do with your safety and protection, I am placing you this day in the Inner Room where my wives reside. There you may entertain them and relieve the monotony of their days."

Takawo Muto bowed and by the frigid smile which the General gave him, he knew he was dismissed.

As the two men walked toward their rooms, followed by a guard, Takawo remarked, smiling a little despite the gloom darkening his friend's face, "In placing me in his Hareem, the General has either too little or too much faith in me."

"I think I shall see you in camp before long," was Kawai's reply.

"I long to join you there," Takawo put in; "surely it will brighten our hearts to become soldiers in the Army of the Revolution, for where all men have seen the vision of a Free China, surely some new and splendid brotherhood must prevail!"

"I can but quote the General," Mizuwo replied. "You are young, and in spirit younger than your years."

With this remark went so strange a smile Takawo was caught by an unexpected sense of fear, and found no words with which to answer.

The young Japanese secretary turned from his friend and began to pack his possessions.

The guard did not quit them. Half an hour later Mizuwo bade Takawo good-by. Muto was loath to lose his companion, believing himself equally guilty with his friend and Kawai's punishment, unjust. Takawo desired to communicate this sentiment, but the guard indicated no further word was to pass between them. At the last moment of farewell the two young men exchanged glances, which for Takawo's part, were charged with sincere friendliness, and then the man whom he had known so briefly, was taken away, and Muto was shut within his own room.

He was not permitted to remain long in contemplation of his friend's probable fate and his own exile. Again the guard appeared and Takawo was summoned to the presence of his host. When the young man entered the office, the General rose from his chair and indicated that his guest follow him. General Ko led the way down the long corridor, out upon the balcony, the scene of the young man's trespass upon the previous evening. Now Takawo was able to observe how strange and beautiful was this garden even in the light of day and though it seemed somewhat neglected, it had a loveliness that touched his heart. Here and there petals and leaves lay upon the ground. The pool was pale. Hushed and still, the reflection of the sky and trees dreamed upon its surface and Takawo was seized by a nostalgia the object of which seemed nebulous yet near.

At the gate to the Hareem the General took from his sleeve a large key and with it opened a narrow gate. Through this they passed into a hall and soon came face to face with a heavy and paneled door set in a wide frame. Above it was a carving of four characters in ancient writ-

ing. The inscription read "Refuge of the Soul," for this section of the house, used now as the private apartments of the General's wives, once had been the residence of priests at a time when the main building had been a temple and a school.

When this venerable door swung wide there opened before Takawo's eyes a room spacious and of many colors and rich with the music of women's voices. A lady came to meet the newcomers. The General spoke:

"I have come to speak with Kai-ma. Please summon her."

The lady bowed and disappeared into a hidden room. Slowly young Muto became aware of women's faces: some as pale as the wintry moon, others so thickly enamelled with cosmetic they seemed jeweled flowers upon a tree of jade.

But he could not gaze long, for their eyes embarrassed him and he found it best to look down on his own feet. This modesty the General noticed and he addressed Muto in a voice more gracious than he had used up to this time.

"Takawo Muto, this will be your home while you are with me. These ladies welcome you, and in turn I ask you to entertain them. This you can do with ease for your childhood and youth have been so different from theirs that anything you may tell will interest them. Remember only this, that my household and my wives are like a tower, inviolate. You may gaze at the tower and speak with those who live in it, but you may never touch one single stone to change the character of the design."

This remark aroused uneasiness in Takawo's spirit and he was happier, therefore, when he saw the lady who had greeted them at their entrance returning in the company

of one he had not seen before. This lady was the only one among them who wore a head-dress; she was older than the others and though she tottered on tiny feet, dignity resided in her ample body.

Higher, and in a voice more familiar than he had used heretofore, the General spoke.

"This, dear Kai-ma, is Takawo Muto, son of my beloved friend, Lord Sumiwo Muto. You will remember that in his castle I once found refuge from my enemies. Now it is my turn to offer hospitality to the Honorable Family of Muto. I deem it unwise for this young man to remain longer in the public section of my house where travelers are forever coming and going. I ask you, therefore, to treat him as your son, and I suggest you assist him in perfecting his Chinese, for circumstance has so ordained his life that his career must begin in our native land rather than in his own."

Then turning to his guest he continued: "If you are not happy here you have only to speak with Madam Ko who is my first, most honored wife. In turn I ask you to obey her as you would your own Mother."

With this the General turned, then paused and went toward a young girl who was kneeling on the floor gathering Manchurian beans into a bowl. To her he addressed himself:

"Lee-Kwan-Tien, do you care for your person preciously?"

The girl, who Takawo perceived was unusually pale and extraordinarily lovely, raised her face and answered in a voice that was low, yet clear so Takawo was able to understand her words:

"My lord, I am as cautious with myself as a person

touching the tail of a tiger. As the time draws near I find my courage mounts even as the dragon upon the clouds."

The young man looked at her more closely. Her glance was wistful and held an infinite patience. This coloring of the spirit, shadowed forth upon a face of exquisite purity, made her lovely in the eyes of Takawo. And strangely she seemed an answer to the longing that had seized his heart when he had passed by the shadowed pool before his entrance to the General's Hareem.

Still the General lingered, glancing down at her the while. Finally he turned to Madam Ko, remarking with a certain soft reproach:

"Are you not letting Lee overdo this occupation?"

Kai-ma pressed together her carefully rouged lips and answered, smiling shrewdly the while:

"My lord, I deem it best she exercise fully because this being her first time it will make matters easier for her."

The General said nothing and presently he left the room.

Madam Ko came forward and Muto admired the nimbleness of her movements though they were a little ludicrous, after the fashion of a bird that is too heavy for its legs.

She addressed the youth:

"Will you not tell me your name again?"

"My name is Takawo Muto."

"Takawo, I desire that you call me Kai-ma which signifies Great Wise Mother. I shall take you to your room which is on the other side of mine. I think that will be the safest refuge for you."

She led the way from the living-room. Before Takawo followed he glanced back for an instant and saw Lee's lovely face turned toward him. Upon her lips floated the memory of a smile and with startled eyes he gazed, for this

girl evoked the image of his Mother; and so entwined with longing for his home was this feeling that when he went from Lee he knew himself an exile from that beauty that could most profoundly move him.

Kai-ma called to Takawo and they passed through her apartment where red lacquer and gold silks shimmered beneath lights delicately shaded, and so into the room that was appointed his. In every detail it was furnished as a nursery. His hostess spoke:

"In this room are gathered the possessions which belonged to my own son. All these I have kept as he left them, and that was more than twenty years ago. No one dares enter here; therefore you will see I have installed you in that place which is the most secure from dangerous eyes."

Takawo looked about him and observed there was no exit from the room except that door which led into Kai-ma's bedroom. Then anger began to burn in him that he who voluntarily had taken upon himself a term of exile, should now be closed within a nursery under the vigilant eyes of a lady who, though she might be charming in herself yet in every way treated him as a child.

This resentment increased when Madam Ko went toward the dresses upon the wall and taking one down, laid it against Takawo. The dress was intended for a child of five years and to put it upon him was so palpably impossible he was tempted to laugh but when he looked at Kai-ma's face and became aware of the hypnotic trance of memory into which his presence had thrown her, he sobered his expression.

Kai-ma shook her head.

"Ah, I forget how the years pass!"

Next she begged him to sit down, and he, not wishing

to offend her, complied. He took his place on the edge of an absurdly small chair; then the incongruity of her wish penetrated even her remembering dream. She sighed:

"No, even that will not do!"

Still she seemed unable to draw herself from the trance of recollection in which Takawo had thrown her. Quite suddenly the young man knew he must break this spell in some abrupt way, so he made a few paces toward the door and said in as harsh a voice as he dared use:

"No, this room will not do at all. I cannot stay!"

She glanced up quickly, her eyes startled, then she came toward him. With one hand she drew his head down to her breast; the other she placed on his shoulder.

"Patience with me, Takawo!"

Her voice was gentle, a little broken. He did not move but remained still, feeling pity sweep through him.

When at last he raised his head and looked at her, he found that her eyes were sparkling with tears.

"I shall stay," he said.

Kai-ma smiled.

The next five days passed quietly. Takawo desired to leave his room, wishing most of all to see the Lady Lee, yet he feared the blunders he might commit because of poverty of speech. His pride, too, was not a little hurt by Kai-ma's excessive maternal interest, and though he tried to persuade himself that this had no effect upon him, he could not overcome the humiliation of being prisoned in the nursery. He reproved himself for these thoughts and as he sat in that gorgeous and ridiculous room without so much as a window from which he might see the world, he

examined his state. What he found he did not endure with complete calm. Had he been a little older and more accustomed to the rôle of hero, he might have known that heroes are perhaps the most ridiculous of figures at home; but at this time he could not contemplate his predicament in this wise. At the hour when his case was being argued at an International Tribunal as a test-case between Japan and Britain, while newspapers printed his picture, he, the political exile whom all authorities were seeking, sat confined within the walls of a nursery with dolls as his closest companions and the furniture itself too small for comfort.

However, this period of silence and aloofness was fruitful of a certain freedom. Whereas his reserve had been instinctive, the result was shrewdly useful. By failing to intrude himself upon the ladies at the beginning of his visit, he gained the confidence of the General and upon the evening of the sixth day his host appeared and addressed Takawo as follows:

"My young and honored guest, if you hide yourself longer, we shall fear you think ill of our household; come, do not remain here like a dead king within his tomb."

At this reproof, which at the same time held the subtlety of a compliment, the young man smiled and spoke his willingness to join the company of the General and his wives.

His desire was ardent that he might see and speak with Lee-Kwan-Tien, but when he entered the living-apartment, all the ladies were present except the one he longed to see.

In the glow of candles the apartment shimmered as if set with many stars. Takawo wished to appear something of a gracious figure in a setting so enchanting and when

Madam Ko came forward, hoping his Chinese vocabulary might serve, he bowed and spoke:

"The General tells me I resemble a dead king sleeping in his tomb; this is too elegant a figure of speech to apply to one so young and awkward. I prefer rather to think of myself as a turtle who hides within his shell."

No sooner were these words gone from his lips than a delicious flutter of laughter came from all the ladies present. Only the General and Kai-ma refrained from outright mirth.

When the ladies had quieted a little, the General spoke:

"In Japan the turtle is the sign of long life and happiness; in China on the contrary it is the symbol of ill-luck. We deem you a modest youth but truly not so self-commiserative as to consider yourself a bogey come to dwell with us."

With these words General Ko smiled affably. But the youth's embarrassment increased and finding no phrase in which to recover poise, he walked toward a window, and with face averted stood there for a moment.

From beneath his lowered lids he caught sight of the General making a sign to Madam Ko, and presently they disappeared; the General passing through the outer door that led to the main house, and Madam Ko into her own room.

As Takawo remained looking from the window he perceived the guard walking in and out of the shadows of the garden and he thought of that first evening when he had sat with Kawai upon the balcony. At that time he had gazed in loneliness and wonder at these lighted windows behind which he stood at this very moment. This change which had come about so quickly filled him with wonder

at the unexpected nature of his existence. Thus lost in revery he was not aware for several moments that the General once more stood before him. There was upon the face of his host a mingling of humor and vexation. His greeting flung the young man into an atmosphere in which he felt cheapened and a little soiled:

"Takawo, you resemble the lost cat that enters an unfamiliar house. You hide near the window and might remain there for the entire night were it not for my return. Presently I shall find you hiding under chairs and tables."

Muto flushed and then was angry with himself for showing his humiliation; moreover the General's face so gleamed with sociability and the sting of his remark appeared so incongruous with his expression that a moment later Takawo could not believe he had heard correctly.

The young man had no time to reply, for the General disappeared into the room of Madam Ko and soon Kai-ma herself returned and coming close to Takawo, whispered:

"The General, though he is merry to all eyes, is in great distress to-night because of certain news he has received. He wishes to be alone with me and if you will be at your ease, may I ask you to remain here until our talk is over?"

Muto replied that nothing would give him greater pleasure. He was hoping that now some conversation might ensue and perhaps Lee might join the ladies and himself, when without further delay Madam Ko ordered the women to their beds and Takawo was left alone. He could not help but wonder if the General had planned this as punishment for his awkwardness.

Takawo comforted himself by going to the window and gazing from it. The moon had risen and was of extraordi-

nary brilliance. The few leaves left upon the trees shivered in the slight autumn wind.

The young man was standing thus, watching the moonlight within the garden, aware dimly as one is aware of the shuttling of a spindle, of the ceaseless pacing of the guard within the shadows, when a silken sound as of feet touching a heavy garment came to his ears and he turned and found that Lee-Kwan-Tien had entered the room.

So deep had been his desire to see her that when he found her face turned toward him he believed for one exquisite moment that she had come in answer to his wish. Then he noticed her confusion at his presence; recovered himself and going toward her, spoke:

"No doubt you have come here so that from this window you may enjoy the moon, and I would go away willingly and leave you alone but the General is speaking with Madam Ko and they have asked me not to interrupt them. Permit me to stay with you and if you will give me your hand, I shall bring you to this window where I shall take good care not to trouble you."

Lee-Kwan-Tien looked at him and he perceived again that infinite patience in her eyes. Without another word he went toward her and took her hand. Her fingers were cool within his own and he was loath to let them go. For many minutes they remained in silence gazing out into the garden and then Lee spoke:

"I had not guessed the persimmons were ripening. I had scarcely noticed they hung upon the trees. It is not quite a year since first I came here."

Takawo feared to speak, so gentle was her voice and so poignant with memory. But the silence between them grew too full to be endured and so at last he ventured words:

"I, too, think of home when I stand here and see this fruit become ripe and the leaves growing thin upon the boughs. Tell me, where is your home?"

The girl looked at him and answered: "My home is in Shanshi which, as you may know, is a mountain-waste. Thence have flown those birds which lived here in this garden in the warm days of summer, and there they have alighted upon the branches of the persimmon-trees which so fill my memory. I wish I might be like those birds flying to Shanshi. There, weeds may grow up between the flowers, and the roof that sheltered us fall into dust, but there my family lived for generations and there my thought turns ceaselessly.

"In the morning men go upon the mountains in Shanshi and capture the bright birds with nets; they bring them here and put them in cages of lacquer and of gold. Listening to their companions, some imprisoned birds may learn to sing, but I do not learn. I remain alone. My song is silent and is made to the child within me; this is my life, and all hope for my future is intwined with it."

Her voice became so low the last words were scarcely audible. The young man felt himself blessed by her confession and the air seemed holy. It hurt him when her tone became casual and she turned to him with one of her smiles of infinite patience:

"Forgive me that I have troubled you. You are a stranger to me but I have told you what is in my heart. Still I do not wish to excuse myself, for I would rather speak with a stranger who may understand, than to those who know me and with whom I have no thought in common."

"Lee-Kwan-Tien, and this name I must call you, for I know no other, let us not be silent through an insincere

reserve that should have no dwelling-place with us. True enough, when first we met, never before had we seen each other's face, yet I am not willing to admit we are strangers. Buddha has said that some spirits are bound together in the past and in the present when they meet, acquaintanceship is needless. It is so with us, for since I first saw you, you have sung in my thought as a stream sings beneath the earth. Indeed, you are the symbol of a beauty from which I'm ever exiled. Then let us not waste this precious hour that is given us but talk freely and with open heart. Lee, speak to one who in another time and place did love you and who has waited these many years to renew that affection once again."

The girl looked at him with brighter eyes and her next words were almost gay:

"I think indeed you speak the truth."

Takawo looked down at Lee and saw that in her hands she held a silken cord which he had not perceived before. Whether her hands had been in shadow and now only the moon had veered so that its light fell upon her fingers, or whether at this moment she had taken the cord from her sleeve, the young man could not say. He questioned her:

"Tell me, if you will, what is this silken thing you play with in your hand?"

Bending her face from him a little, she replied: "It is the cord in which I tie thoughts for my child. In this house which I am never permitted to leave I am aware neither of the passing of the days nor of the months and only by this cord am I able to tell how near I am come to the time of my child's birth. This silk which is of scarlet and of gold I have torn from the belt which Madam Ko gave me to wear within my dress. Kai-ma does not know

I have mutilated the belt in order to count the days of my waiting. Each night when every one is asleep I come here to this room and looking from this window I think I see, beyond the trees, the garden, and the moon, the mountains of my own home. So dreaming, I tie a knot in the silk and bless it for my child's sake. When my hour comes I shall wind this cord about my waist. It will give me courage, for I shall recall every brave thought and every strong desire that has gone into the tying of the cord. Who knows but my child may be a son who may bring me to Shanshi again?"

She ceased and in this pause the young man saw her fingers move backward upon the cord until they came to the first knot of all. There they remained, pressing the silk firmly.

"This knot is for the first day which I shall remember always. I was in my home-village in the mountains. The harvesting was over, the fields clear, and war had begun as usual.

"A regiment of General Ko's army was moving toward us. In this regiment was Captain Kin-Loo, a young man, son of a friend of my Father. Some five years before he had gone away to Foo-Tien and there had come under the influence of General Ko's discipline. Finally he joined his army. Though our village belonged to the opposite camp he came to visit us from time to time. Indeed he had become dear to my Father who had no other child but me, and it was his wish we marry, but our wedding was delayed because of the vicissitudes of war.

"I recall clearly that night when the enemy encamped outside the gates of our village. From our house we could see bonfires so great they seemed to touch the moon. All

our young men were in the firing-line; all our elders gathered at the Guan-Haik. I was at home, alone.

"Then my thoughts went hurrying back and forth, now to my Father, now to the man I loved. No matter how devoted might be their hearts, I knew that with the dawn they must fight each other.

"Hours passed and I listened at my window for the first sound of firing. It did not come. Finally I heard a gentle knocking at my door. I was afraid. The knocking went on. At last I opened. I saw before me a man dressed in farmer's clothes. He carried a bundle under one arm. Without explanation he stepped into my house, took me in his arms, and then in the light of the family-shrine I recognized Kin-Loo. He began to speak:

" 'My Commander knows this village is my home and to use my knowledge of the place he has made me leader of a scouting-squad. But I have deserted in order to come and warn you and your Father. You are safe, but where is my friend, Mee-Tu, is he not here?'

"I replied by telling him my Father had gone to confer with the elders; there was no immediate danger; and he would not return home until the meeting was over.

" 'But I must go at once,' Kin-Loo continued, 'for then I can warn him scouts are abroad. I must persuade him not to join the firing-line to-morrow! He is too precious to us both.'

"He started to leave but I held him, saying: 'Wait only a little, for at present he is not in danger. Wait only an hour and then you may go to him. If you go now I shall never see you again.'

" 'Do not speak so,' he went on, 'I shall escape harm and before spring is come we shall be happy.'

"But with these words of fortitude went so fatal a look of resignation that I would not let him go but drew him closer.

"That brief, unforgettable and precious hour passed too swiftly. We were brought back to the dangers of our position when we heard the sound of horse's hoofs outside our window. Our door was thrown open and my Father appeared within the room.

"'I thought to find you here, Kin-Loo! As my beloved friend I welcome you, but as my enemy I command you to be gone! We must lose because you far outnumber us; if you return you may win the name of hero but if you remain you will be counted a deserter and be killed either by your own men or by mine!'

"Captain Loo stood erect, faced my Father. With a last glance at me, he swung about and quit the room.

"A few minutes later my Father followed.

"Within the hour firing began and continued until dawn. Next afternoon my Father returned, wounded. A few days later he died of the hurts he had received, and when the enemy invaded our village, they discovered me and took me with them to headquarters. There General Ko saw me and brought me here."

Lee was silent and Takawo touched her hand: "And since that time you have not heard of Captain Loo, made no search for him?"

She smiled palely: "Is it not clear I am unable to search for him, closed here as the bird within the cage? Some messages brought me secretly from Shanshi say that he was killed. Others tell he has deserted the army and become a bandit. For our love's sake I pray that he still lives!"

"Do you believe that he still lives?"

"I do so believe and this is one reason why I have spoken to you. It is possible that in your wanderings, and I have good reason to believe you will not remain here long, you may hear news of him, and if good fortune pleases, you may see him. If you do so, I beg of you as the dearest wish of my heart to give him word of me and of where I am and of his child I bear."

With this, Lee tore from the cord a few strands of silk which she braided together and gave Takawo:

"It is not likely we shall have again the freedom to talk alone, therefore I give you this, being the only thing I own. In it my thought and spirit dwell. Take it as from a friend who has faith you will fulfill her mission in so far as you are able."

"Dear Lee, not only will I bend my steps upon this quest, but I count myself blessed that I have found a purpose to my days which otherwise might have been lost in vain longing for the home from which I'm ever exiled."

He came near to touch her hand. Suddenly heavy steps sounded near. The General stood within the room.

The candles had burned so low it was impossible for Takawo to tell just what lay in the eyes of his host but his total ignoring of himself indicated well enough what was in the General's mind.

"Lee, this hour is late for you to remain awake. You are now General Ko's favorite wife and my child whom you bear is the center of my ambition and my hope. All I do is for his sake so he may be the crown of my old age. Because of my heir, be careful with yourself. Give me your hand and I shall take you to your room."

But Lee did not offer her hand at once; and with a calm which astonished Takawo, replied:

"My Lord, I have been awaiting you and my anxiety became great at your delay. This young man, your guest, kindly spoke with me and his entertainment has helped in some small way to allay my fears that all might not be well with you."

With this she gave Takawo a long and wordful glance and then extended her hand to the General who took it without further speech and so led her from the room.

For many moments, Takawo stood bewildered by his loss of Lee, by the General's manner and speech and by Lee's skillful deceit of her Lord. But the young man was not permitted to remain alone with his thoughts, for General Ko presently crossed the room and disappeared into the apartment of Kai-ma. Some minutes elapsed and again the General passed through the living-room. He went out through the door that led to the official section of the house.

Young Muto was about to knock at Madam Ko's door when this lady herself appeared and bade him enter. He did so and noted the anxious expression of her eyes though her benign face still held the shadow of a smile.

When he had seated himself in one of her chairs of scarlet lacquer, his hostess turned to him:

"I am unhappy at the news I bring you. The General is at present in great distress of mind, for the war is not going as well for our forces as he had hoped. Because of his family ties it is difficult for plain people to believe in him, thinking an aristocrat cannot sincerely embrace the revolutionary cause. He has determined we must move from here and has given me the responsibility of dispersing his wives, sending them back to their homes till safer days are come. Lee-Kwan-Tien and myself he will place in some

safe hiding-place and I wish you might go with us. But we shall dwell in darkness and the General says you, being a young man, must live in the light of day since it is his duty to help you begin your career.

"Perhaps you understand a little what this parting will mean to me, for in all these years I have been without a son and have had no young person whom I might love with a mother's love. The young girls who come here soon turn from me, though I try to be as kindly and tender as I can. They never remain long, for soon they are married to high officers in order to bind these men in friendship to my Lord. When you first came here I thought I might care for you as for my own son and now this, too, must end."

Her eyelids drooped and as Takawo sat watching her he endeavored to weave into a pattern the various threads of sentiment he had observed in her. He could not forget how he had first seen Lee picking up the Manchurian beans from the floor. Though he knew this occupation was deemed good for women in her state, he had felt that Kai-ma had imposed this task upon the girl for reasons not entirely generous.

This was in his thought when he addressed Madam Ko:

"And will Lee-Kwan-Tien be kept from harm?"

Kai-ma smiled tolerantly:

"Of course, Lee will be kept from harm. Neither the General nor I could endure the loss of the child she bears. We have so looked forward to its birth I feel already as if it were my own."

"You mean the child will be taken from her?" His anxiety for Lee had crept into his voice.

Kai-ma was defensive: "The child will be ours, for without it we have no one who may inherit our properties."

Then turning suddenly upon him she added: "Have I not had my child taken from me?"

Her voice rose to a quaver of excitement and Takawo, fearing to bring upon her that hysterical state of recollection that was evoked by mention of her son, quickly changed the matter of their talk:

"May I ask if the General has left some message for me that I may know his pleasure?"

Though Takawo's words were courtly he felt at this moment so stinging a hatred for his host and hostess he could scarce contain himself.

Kai-ma recovered her habitual calm: "The General suggests you choose your career and he promises to help you as well as he is able."

For some moments the young man thought in silence. At last he expressed his wish:

"Because of my Father's faith in the ideals of Sun-Yat-Sen and because I long to experience the free brotherhood of men, I wish to join the Army of the Revolution."

Kai-ma smiled indulgently: "Then, Takawo, I am certain I can find the means for you to be made an officer, and without delay."

"This, Madam Ko," he replied, "is gracious on your part but I beg leave to mingle with the men who make up the rank and file of your army. It is fitting that as the son of my Honored Father I join the revolutionary movement not as a favored child but as one of the humblest soldiers, sharing that life which in time may impart to me a little wisdom."

Kai-ma did not answer at once and Takawo saw that she was offended that he had not allowed her this last maternal luxury of making him an officer. Nevertheless her gracious-

ness came back to her and walking toward him she put an arm about his shoulder and looked at him tenderly:

"Wherever you go, I beg you love me as your adopted mother and when these days are done, perhaps we may meet again."

He might have found it in his heart to respond to her had not the face of Lee-Kwan-Tien come before him so he was blinded to all else. He could think only of the fate that awaited her, and how that child who was both her life and hope would be taken from her.

At the Sei-Loo Camp, Takawo Muto found that orders respecting him had gone on ahead and despite his wish to be one of the common soldiers, he was made second-lieutenant and found himself dressed in the uniform of the General's officers.

He saw plainly the irony of his position, for he had wished to lose his identity in the ranks of common soldiers whom he considered the root and soil of the Revolution; and since he was prevented from doing this, he dedicated himself as far as he was able, to learn the true mind and spirit of those put under his command.

Muto's unit consisted of thirty-five men, recruits from the ages of sixteen to sixty, levied mostly from the coolie class. In the barrack, Takawo gathered these men about him and questioned them regarding the laws of discipline which appeared in the military text-book. The first of these principles read:

"You must sacrifice everything for 'Jing.' This is the primary law of war."

He turned to a young peasant: "What do you understand by 'Jing'?"

The boy fixed his eye on a louse that was taking its way up the neck of the man in front of him, and mumbled mechanically: "The people."

Muto turned to another youth and directed the same inquiry at him. He stretched himself, yawned mournfully, and murmured: "Every one."

"Do you mean you are fighting for the landlords who collect your rents as well as for your wives and children?"

There was a sudden grunt of anger from the unit.

"But 'Jing,'" Muto continued, wishing to strip their minds to the efficient cause that brought them here, "includes every one and the landlord is one of the people. Then you must admit you are sacrificing your lives for your landlords as well as for your families and comrades."

A sour silence followed and into this pool of the united mind, Takawo dipped deeper:

"If you were well-fed and comfortable at home you would still come here to sacrifice your lives?"

"Hee-Yoo!" An old man who squatted in a corner of the hall had let fall the word and now he was shaking his head. All the men were doing the same.

"Well, then, have you come here because at home you would be even more miserable? Or are you come to sacrifice your lives because of a Free China?"

"Free China no place seen," commented a farmer, carefully scratching his ear.

Takawo looked about him and the sullen apathy that was settling on the men filled him with vague hopelessness. He hastened to lift this mood, to reassure himself.

"Let us now turn to the second command of military discipline: 'You must work like bees.' Well, do you like to work like bees?"

This last remark he put to a man who had the hands and face of a porter.

"Too much work already," the man mumbled.

"Is this true for most of you?" Muto addressed the soldiers as one man.

As one man they nodded.

"Then you have no desire to work like bees? But the two laws are inseparable: you must work like bees in order to die without complaint. These two things I expect of you. When we go to the firing-line to-morrow keep these laws in mind. If you do not like fighting and cannot understand why you are here, quit. I tell you rations are short; you may find better meals elsewhere."

With this Takawo ended the first lesson in military discipline.

On the following day Muto's unit went into battle and for almost a week they were in action. When at last he gathered them in his barrack he found he had lost ten.

"You prefer to go on with me?" he asked those left.

The men nodded, grinning.

Takawo had observed that his unit had fought well, going into battle with a certain humorous doggedness which he had not seen in the other soldiers. He was well pleased with them and felt it might be the greatest human experiment to rule an entire army through this "discipline."

But his opportunity to command men was short-lived, for news of his conversations with his unit soon spread to his superior-officers and his command was taken from him. By the middle of the second week Takawo Muto was confined to a training-school some miles behind the front.

Hardly a day had passed when he was summoned into the presence of the commander. Who this might be Muto was not informed.

At the appointed hour the guard brought him to the main office of the Officers' Barracks and Muto was led into a room similar to the one in the great house at Chio-Foo. Once more Takawo found himself in the presence of General Ko.

He was now dressed in khaki uniform and the smile of the gracious host was gone. He watched Muto several moments in silence and then began to speak:

"I have been informed of your activities. I thought you understood my position as Commander of the Revolutionary Cause. As one who has received my hospitality it is strange you should increase my difficulties."

Muto winced, disliking even the appearance of discourtesy, but stinging under disappointment, he made bold to speak:

"General, my Honored Father, Sumiwo Muto, instilled in me belief that in the Army of the Revolution would prevail a new equality and freedom, a true brotherhood of men. This ideal has dictated my conduct toward my men; and I think your officers must admit, General, that my unit fought more bravely than the others at the Sei-Loo Front. I had not one deserter after a week of protracted fighting. Few units could boast this record. Is not this proof that my discipline served well?"

"Your so-called 'discipline' depends for its success upon the personality of the officer. Surely you cannot be so naïve as to believe your doctrine of freedom can be applied to the army in general."

"I am indeed naïve enough to believe in this very prin-

ciple which you so lightly discard. By what signs are the people to know the difference between the revolutionary forces and the armies of those who would enslave them if the daily life of the camp is identical? You wage war to free China and meanwhile you unfit your people to exercise that freedom which you proclaim is your goal."

The General looked up slowly: "You have started a grave undermining of my men." He ignored completely the point Muto had just made.

The young man persisted: "I have heard it said, General, that some men feel the fire-bell starts the fire and the prediction of the weather bureau makes the storm. I believe it the part of wisdom to seek the fire first and not to be misled by the ringing of the bell. I may be like the bell or the prediction of the weather bureau, but I am certain the fire and the storm were in existence before I came. It might be well for the success of your cause to look first to the source of the fire and the beginnings of the storm. Your men were discontented; I have let them speak out their discontent and now they are the more willing soldiers. This may sound absurd to you, but I have proved the truth in practice."

The General did not answer but played with the cake of ink upon his desk. Finally he turned to the younger man and in a voice of complete weariness, said:

"Takawo, I weigh your words because you are your Father's son and some of his wisdom may have come to you. Nevertheless I perceive you are in need of strict discipline and therefore I shall send you into the Kan-den Camp of the Common Soldiers. In honesty I cannot recommend you; you must take the same chance as any coolie.

Remember if you were not the son of Lord Sumiwo Muto, at this moment, you would be the target for six rifles."

The following day Takawo was taken further north to Soo-chin where fighting was more violent than in Sei-Loo and where conditions of camp were far worse.

The barracks were vermin-ridden and some of the dead still lay unburied. From time to time starving old women came to take from the dead, clothes to use against the cold of winter. These sights and the memory of the General's luxurious dwelling at Chio-Foo so put Muto in the spirit of revolt he determined to get out of the army. He knew that open rebellion would not avail, because having come here as a common soldier, it would be dangerous if not fatal to cross his superiors in any obvious way.

The officer immediately above Takawo in rank was Sen-Shyo, a man as young as himself and far smaller in stature. Indeed he had the expressionless stare of a baby and his hands were like small yellow cushions. "The Little Lieutenant" irritated Muto and he devised a plan of escape.

One morning during target practice Lieutenant Sen-Shyo commanded Takawo to shoot. But the latter shook his head, and embraced his gun lovingly.

"Shoot," sputtered the Lieutenant.

Still Takawo hugged his weapon.

"Better obey your superior!"

"That is what I'm doing. My most superior officer is General Ko and I have heard him say that shot and supplies are getting short. Therefore I shall not waste ammunition on a target when there are so many enemy heads to puncture."

The little officer raised himself on his toes:

"I tell you, Boo-Kie, salute!"

Muto slouched the gesture, looking sadly on the ground the while.

"What! Are you dying of cholera? Salute, and in good form!"

The same vague hand-to-temple was Takawo's answer.

"Don't you know how to salute your officer?" The Little Lieutenant dug the ground with the points of his polished boots.

Muto looked plaintively in the eyes of the officer.

"But please tell me, Lieutenant, who is my 'superior'? Since the purpose of war is to kill, the superior man is he who kills the most men. If you're a better killer than I, then I'll salute you."

The Lieutenant strangled.

"Sal—ute, you Boo-Kie!"

"If I salute you will you salute me in turn?" Takawo's face was beautiful with humility.

"Certainly an officer always answers the salute of his soldiers." Lieutenant Shyo breathed more easily.

"Then I salute you!" Takawo did so, in excellent form.

The Little Lieutenant snapped his answer. His eyes popped with pride.

Takawo saluted.

Lieutenant Shyo saluted.

Once more the right hand of Muto flew to his temple; the right hand of the Little Lieutenant flew to his. The left hand of Muto grasped his dagger; the left hand of the Lieutenant grasped his dagger. Arms wheeled; legs flexed; heels snapped. A pair of human windmills sawing the air for discipline.

The face of the Little Lieutenant was pricked with purple; the face of Takawo was cool and saintly.

Soldiers snickered.

Anger ignited in the polished boots, forced its way up through the thighs, the chest, the throat of the Little Lieutenant.

"Re—tire!" The word exploded on the lips of the officer. His heels dug the ground. He faced about. Was gone.

Benignly, Takawo smiled.

It could not be stated accurately that Lieutenant Sen-Shyo welcomed the sight of Muto after that day; moreover Takawo always took occasion to salute his officer in the presence of the others and the Little Lieutenant was forced to reply. This continued for a week. Then young Muto was transferred to the mess-department.

In the kitchen he made excellent sport with Chinese pumpkins which he tossed into the air and caught on the point of his knife When reproved by the Quarter-master for this behavior he pleaded he was poor in bayonet-technique, had not been allowed at the front on this account, but was eager to be a hero and was, therefore, practicing whenever he could.

His passion for literal "discipline" saved him from undue labor, for whenever an officer presented himself to investigate what was going on, Takawo saluted profusely and afterward when reproved by the cook for the small amount of work he had finished, he explained that whereas others might peel more potatoes or carve more pumpkins, he had the true military spirit, delighting above all things else, in paying respect to those men who in killing had proved themselves his superior.

But this mock-innocence could not protect him forever.

Two weeks after he had entered the kitchen, he was transferred to the firing-line. He was told that on the morrow he would take part in a scouting-expedition into the enemy's lines. When he learned that the scout-leader would be the Little Lieutenant, Takawo was convinced this was a way the officer had devised for revenge. Takawo was fully aware, that at night and in the uninhabited country the scouts must cross, the loss of a private would not be questioned.

When evening fell, three soldiers, Lieutenant Shyo, and Takawo Muto proceeded into the region that lay between the two camps. Recently the harvests had been taken in and the earth was not yet mutilated by war.

The men passed over corn-fields and small hills and came at last into a wood. Lieutenant Shyo and the three scouts were excellent horsemen, for men of Manchuria are "born in the saddle." Muto had little technique as a rider and the discomfort he suffered gave him an excuse for lingering a little behind the others. As they rode in among the trees and the deep shadows cast by them, the group ahead was lost to sight. Takawo reined in his horse; the men shouted to him; but he did not answer. When complete darkness closed him in, he dismounted, took his bag of rations on his back, and gave his animal a blow that sent it galloping away.

He sat down to consider his position: he knew it was for no good purpose that he, who had posed as the camp-fool, suddenly had been placed in a scouting-expedition for which only the most experienced men were chosen. He had done nothing that would actually condemn him to death but he had so converted himself into a pest that no doubt his officers were determined to be rid of him. On

this expedition Lieutenant Shye had been chosen to "lose" him.

"True enough I am 'lost,'" thought Takawo with satisfaction. "but I, not he, has done the losing. Lieutenant Shye will not have the glory at least.

"My horse will return to camp. I shall not go in that direction. The scouts are making for the enemy lines, therefore I shall not follow them. If I am caught by the enemy, I shall be killed as a spy, and if I turn back the General's officers will shoot me as a deserter. Therefore I shall strike out midway between the two camps!"

He rose and walked slowly forward, feeling his way and trying to follow the direction upon which he had determined. He wandered the night long and at dawn found himself in a grove of trees. The boughs were bare of leaf and there was rime frost upon the ground. The air was clear of the sound of guns or the howl of wolves. He sat down and munched his kwan-pai, wondering meanwhile where he was and in what direction he should proceed. Suddenly he noticed at a little distance before him a streak in the earth which indicated some digging had taken place there. He picked up a stick, dug, and found a wire running parallel with the ground. He knew at once this wire was the kind that connects explosive stations. Now he was completely bewildered for he did not know if he had come into the territory of his own camp or if he had wandered so far out of his direction that he was now within the lines of the enemy.

He looked about trying to orient himself when at some distance away he saw a slow-moving river along the bank of which a large company of cavalry in the uniform of the enemy was riding toward those woods from which he had

just emerged and through which he imagined lay his own camp.

He darted in among the trees, retracing his steps as best he could. Now that chance had brought him within sight of the enemy, it seemed to him safety lay in returning to his own camp. If he could warn his own officers in time they might never know he had tried to escape. Feverishly he made his way through the woods of morning and came at last to an outpost which he recognized at once as belonging to his own camp. He realized as he emerged from the woods that all night long he had wandered, not away from both camps as he had planned, but directly into the enemy-lines.

At this station two officers were in command. Muto ran to them, saluted, told what he had seen.

"Their cavalry must plan to circle our right." The officer darted a glance at Takawo. "You are the only one of the scouts who has returned. You shall be decorated with the 'Sun and Dragon.'"

"I'll recommend him," snapped the other officer. "This single man brings news three failed to get. The 'news' may save the day!"

The first officer sent a message to headquarters. About noon Takawo was summoned to the barracks where the Captain in command presented him with the uniform of First Lieutenant. When he was dressed in this, he was decorated with the emblem of the Sun and Dragon.

"It is well," thought Takawo, "that the Chinese who wage seasonal wars do not wait until the ending of hostilities to decorate their heroes. They make their 'heroes' on the spot, and this is fortunate for me; who knows what would come of this if the truth emerged?"

On that same day the Cavalry of Moo-Fai was routed. When news of this victory came to camp, celebration was held. Muto became the man of the moment and once more he amused himself by considering the intimate knowledge he was receiving of the profession of "hero."

While his case had been discussed at an International Tribunal he was spending his days in Kai-ma's nursery, and by trying to escape from the army he had put his foot into the trap of heroism and was strutting his decoration before those very officers who only a short time before had taken him for the camp-fool.

On the day following the victory, a message came to Muto that General Ko sent his personal congratulations:

"I have always believed in your courage and nobility and as a reward for your signal bravery in the face of danger, you shall retire behind the lines to our Vacation-Village of Soo-Loo."

Takawo smiled. He saw the General's shrewd intent. Through this act of "bravery," he, Takawo Muto, automatically had been made Lieutenant and was once more in a position to command men. Muto knew well the General was not eager he spread further his theories of "discipline."

However General Ko's suggestion harmonized with Muto's own desire, for it enabled him to avoid the publicity that was being given his exploit. Newspapers began to give details of his adventure, though not one of these details would have been accepted by Muto as authentic. Photographers attached to headquarters wished to take his picture and now Takawo feared seriously for his safety, for should he be recognized by those authorities that were searching for him, further punishment would fall upon

him. Therefore he accepted gladly the escape from searching eyes which the General's command offered.

On the fifth day after his adventure Lieutenant Takawo Muto and three soldiers who had been awarded minor decorations were driven in an army-wagon to the Vacation-Village of Soo-Loo, ten miles behind the front.

As they approached the gate of the village, young Muto perceived the crimson uniforms of the military police and as they drove up these officers saluted him profusely. He returned their greeting with casual and friendly gestures. A crowd, mostly women, awaited them within the gate. As the wagon creaked its way through the streets, Takawo observed the houses looked neglected as if the regular routine of existence had ceased and as if the inhabitants were on a holiday habitual and boring. Takawo noted, too, that the soldiers who swarmed everywhere in the narrow lanes were unusually clean of uniform. Takawo remarked this to a police officer who had clambered into the wagon beside him.

The man explained:

"The native women take great pleasure in being at the service of these heroes. They house them and wash their clothes. Of course, in your case we have orders to take you to the residence of Tien-the-Great. There you will find willing hands and pleasing company."

Takawo bowed his gratitude for this signal honor and began to imagine the nature of his dwelling-place. There were two fears in his mind; a nursery and the watchful eye of a too-devoted Kai-ma.

Presently the wagon came to a stop before a large house set in a walled garden. A man-servant welcomed him and showed him his living-quarters. For several days he saw

no other person. Then one morning in the garden he met those who made up the family of the house: it consisted of Madam Tien, a woman of thirty-five, and three young girls, the two younger of whom were daughters of his hostess.

He found the sixteen-year-old Biu-Lin the most charming of them all, yet there was something so shy in the attitude of all the ladies that he became increasingly convinced they feared to approach him because of some strange distrust. To see what they would do if he spent his evenings elsewhere, he began going to the See-Kwai Shyo.

In the "club" the "heroes," sun-burnt, pox-pitted, sweaty, and drunk were playing at shee-koa. And as they played they drank deeply. Meanwhile girls of the town strolled in among the tables and were embraced between turns at chopsticks, bowls and coins.

The confusion, heat, the evil odors of the place sickened Takawo and he felt he could not remain there long, but soon he, too, was drinking shye-chou. The burning wine made a film over his eyes and brain. He tore the Sun and Dragon decoration from his coat and determined to return to his house and boldly ask Biu-Lin to walk with him. He left the club and went rapidly toward the destination of his desire. As he made quick steps down his street he saw that in Biu-Lin's room a light still burned and a delicate shadow moved back and forward across the illumined screen.

Then into memory stole another evening. He saw again those gentle silhouettes of Ladies of the General's Hareem and recalled that melancholy and deserted garden with the persimmons ripening upon the trees. This thought was the key to the treasure-box of recollection and now that it was

opened, his affection and his longing for Lee enveloped him. He recalled that precious and brief hour when they had been together and he seemed to hear once again her tender and patient voice: "For our love's sake, I pray that he still lives."

He rebuked himself for losing sight of the sacred mission with which she had entrusted him and determined that his search for Captain Loo should pattern his wanderings, having of his own free will given up all ambition for himself.

These thoughts had broken the mood in which he had left the club and when finally he entered the Tien house and the gentle and charming little Biu-Lin was at the door to meet him, he found it impossible to return her coy advances and went at once to his own room.

So time passed and there was no growth of friendship between Biu-Lin and himself. Nor did he desire it, consecrating himself to acquisition of knowledge regarding this village in which fate had placed him.

The abundance of food in this small hamlet, which lay among farms deserted and robbed of all their produce by the circumstance of war, puzzled Takawo and he pondered this mystery one evening while he sat in the Soo-Kwai-Shyo and smoked with a casual companion, a young soldier from Kiyoo-Lien.

"Who is it that brings supplies to this place, for surely these mutilated farms that surround us can yield no produce?"

The young soldier grunted impatiently: "Don't you know the house where you live belonged to Tien-the-Great, and the young girls and widow are his family? Tien was ruler here for twenty years. He was the strongest

bandit north of The Great Wall and for his sake his fraternity still allows supplies to come here. They guard all the roads leading from the city of Ei-Kao."

At the word "bandit" Takawo's curiosity was sharply pricked. Lee-Kwan-Tien had said: "Others tell that Captain Loo has deserted the army and become a bandit."

"Is there a successor to Tien-the-Great in whose house I dwell?"

The soldier looked in the direction of a wooden partition at the end of the hall: "Behind that he sits. He can see us. We can't see him."

He caressed his pipe. His small eyes glittered.

"Tell me something of this person who hides himself from us."

The soldier waved his hand in refusal. A tremor of fear darkened his face and he rose abruptly and left Takawo. Bewildered and annoyed, young Muto watched the man disappear into one of the small rooms adjoining the hall. As the soldier opened the door the sweet fetid odor of opium rolled like a heavy wave into the already nauseous sea where the "heroes" sat.

Shamed that in this place he should spend so much time, Takawo rose and went out into the street. He determined to question Biu-Lin regarding her Father, regarding the mysterious unseen proprietor of the club, and learn what she might tell him of the bandits who controlled this village. When he came near his house the lighted window which had welcomed him so many evenings now was dark, and that black and silent house unfriendly. He felt himself miserably alone. For a moment he wished he had met Biu-Lin's advances on that evening when she had waited for him; but he knew that if she appeared beside him now,

she would no more than cast a momentary gleam upon the pool of his deep longing for the lovely Lee who had evoked in him a tenderness wrapped with memories of his own home: the murmur of his Mother's voice as she had recited ancient tales on the balcony of their castle; the sound of the dawn-bell upon the tower; the sigh of the rain upon the pines within the Sacred Garden. His love for Lee was embroidered and shot through with the poignancy of exile. That she, too, had been a stranger in an alien place gave to her a precious and exclusive place within his heart. No other woman would have assuaged the subtle and mysterious longing that tormented him; he knew that he would seek her in all women, and fearing that if he remained there in the garden where but a knock upon a window, a muffled invitation, would bring Biu-Lin, he turned quickly and walked away. On this night he would not play traitor to his deep desire.

He walked up and down the moon-blue streets, now quickly, now slowly as if driven by the wind of inner storm. Finally the chill of his body drove him toward a shelter and he found himself once more sitting in the club with a bowl of shyo-chou in his hand and the seduction of opium in his nostrils.

How long he sat there he could not tell but gradually the greasy faces of the "heroes" disappeared and he saw in his half-dream a tower set upon a dark earth. The tower too was dark but at its height he saw Lee standing and her face was a light illumining the night. She smiled upon him and with her hands pointed downward. At the foot of the tower four roads met, and the moonlight made of them shimmering sinuous silver ways.

The scene faded and he sat before a goddess, but no fea-

ture of her face could he distinguish, for over her lay a golden dust so thick that she was obscured save for the vaguest outline of her form. He rose and going to her, sought to clear away the veil, but when he touched it, it was sand.

Suddenly, he felt his mouth filled. He tried to scream; he could not, and then his throat was closed. He knew he was buried under that golden layer of earth, and this goddess was companion to his death—the last exile of all. From the rim of the living world, a great wind rose. It screamed within his ears. He tried to rise.

"You Pig born without sight!"

"You Hungry Fly of Blue!"

Takawo unlocked his dreaming eyes and saw before him, close by, four arms that clawed the air for mastery of a knife. The screaming of the wind in his dream became the snarling of two men who embraced in fury.

Takawo staggered to his feet; was about to shout some command that might hold them back, when suddenly the room froze. It congealed into a silence the center of which was the upraised arms, the knife. That silence rippled; it solidified until the hall was locked in ice. A man was entering. He was walking from behind the partition. He was tall. He was naked to the waist. He was immense in the shoulders. His face seemed hewn from yellow stone; his eyes borrowed from the tiger. Slowly, with a strange still power, he advanced upon the fighters.

The upraised knife spun in the air, clattered to the floor, then followed silence so thick it might be eaten with a spoon.

The man naked to the waist turned and walked toward Takawo. The sound of his steps shattered the stillness, dispelled it from the hall. Men scraped their chairs, breathed again, laughed, talked.

Meanwhile, the man with tiger eyes loomed above Takawo:

"Lieutenant, may I offer you a drink?"

"No more, I thank you."

"I am Foo-Lang, the proprietor of this club. I trust my shyo-chou is good enough to please you."

"It is excellent, but no more."

"Will you do me the honor of sitting with me in the other room?"

Takawo rose and bowed. The tall man turned and led the way. Upon his golden back was tattooed an immense tombstone.

Muto followed.

Thereafter during the long evenings it became habitual for Takawo Muto to sit with Foo-Lang, the proprietor of the Soo-Kwai-Shyo. Muto talked much of his life in the army and of his eagerness to escape from the discipline in which he had no faith.

When he felt that Foo-Lang would not resent questioning, he asked him regarding Tien's house and concerning the character of the man who had been master of it.

Foo-Lang answered: "Great Tien came to this village thirty years ago. In order to eat, people killed each other. This he stopped. He imposed peace. In the midst of war he did not neglect this place. It prospered. Our sorrow is we have lost him, but from whence he came will come others.

Bandits are like clouds. When storms threaten, they gather; when storms end, they scatter and no man knows where they flee. Now that the war is centralized in this region they have moved to those stretches of country not within the eyes of men."

"You speak with understanding of the bandits," Takawo put in, "can it be that you are one of them?"

"Who knows? For the past three months I have been living where I see neither sun nor moon. I watch these drunken 'heroes' and my body aches to be riding upon my horse again. I hope this war will end that I may return from whence I came."

"I have seen too much of 'heroes' to hold them in respect," Takawo was thinking most especially of himself. "I have no further desire to return to the army where heroism is but a trick of ignorance and luck. If I remain here I shall grow weak and foolish."

"If we wish to domesticate animals, we shut them up. This is not destiny for a man. This war makes warriors ashamed. Men die and are left to lie upon the earth, and no person remembers where they fall. No matter what the risk, among Mai-Sai it is a sacred duty to bring home the dead. When we die, our brothers remember always. We may know the true sweets of a hero's death."

"Could I, who am young and without knowledge, become a member of the Banditry?"

"You will leave everything behind; wealth, honors, family."

"I have left my family so dishonor may not fall on them. I shall never have wealth, being without heart to perform those deeds necessary to obtain it. I wish to escape from

this life of 'hero,' seeing in it too clearly the irony of life. Can you not show me a way?"

"If you have faith and are without regrets, we shall see."

Some evenings later when Takawo was walking in the garden of Tien's house contemplating whether or no he should go again to the club, there came toward him Madam Tien, the mother of the two younger girls. She walked in shadow so that he could not see her face clearly, but he observed at once that she carried a large bundle under one arm.

When she was quite close she spoke: "I am told that you desire to change your existence. Always in looking at you I thought of you as one who speaks to the moon rather than to men. The life you now lead is not suited to you. I have often chided my daughters for not entertaining you more fittingly. If they had, you might have remained at home; instead you found pleasure at the Soo-Kwai-Shyo where the fumes of opium and the fury of shyo-chou caused you to forget your true nature. I was saddened because of this, but now I know all was for the best for there you met Foo-Lang and he has revealed to you the honor of our way of life. Believing you see clearly what you wish to do, I beg you to receive this bundle which contains the clothes my husband wore as a young man. They are my most precious possession and I feel you will wear them worthily. Through you, it may be our power will be increased. Take these and have faith, for our people will never fail you."

She held out her arms as if to give him the package that she held, but Takawo was not ready to accept it.

"Tell me, Madam Tien, that I may have wisdom when I wear these garments, why it is Foo-Lang remains in this life which he despises?"

"It is because when my husband died there was no one to take Tien's place. The army and the bandits are like the pheasant and the snake. They cannot live in peace together; neither can they prosper without each other. The army will not hunt us because they do not wish to make us allies of the enemy. We repay them by providing necessities to their men. This village was well-governed under my husband; the only way for it to avoid starvation is to continue under Mai-Sai rule. Foo-Lang was chosen as the one man who could insure this village its supplies. It is his duty to keep order and he knows well that all trouble starts in the club. Therefore he prefers to watch over the 'heroes' himself. They are children in his keeping. But I fear he will not remain among us long for he wishes to return to the Life of the Horse that he loves."

"Then Foo-Lang is of the same brotherhood as your honored husband?"

"Foo-Lang need only gallop toward the North, to the Kin of the Everlasting Evergreen and there he will enjoy once more the freedom of Mai-Sai. He will live no longer like an animal caged."

She paused and held the bundle in her outstretched hands: "Then you will become one of us?"

At once his mind flashed back to the words of Lee:

"Some say Kin-Loo became a bandit. . . ."

Fate now seemed a queen bestowing her accolade upon his shoulder, for this question put to him in this strange setting and by this lady opened the gate to pursuance of his pilgrimage. He answered her:

"I count it an honor to inherit these garments. May I wear them with all virtue to commemorate their owner!"

He took the bundle gently from her arms and bowed. Madam Tien turned and presently became one with the shadows of the garden.

When Takawo heard no longer the small rustle of her feet upon the earth, he turned and made his way to the club. It was dense with fumes and smoke. He went toward the partition behind which he was accustomed to spend his evenings. But Foo-Lang was not there.

He sat down at a table and ordered shyo-chou, thinking to wait for the man he regarded now as friend. But these moments became half-hours, these in turn became hours, and still he sat as in a stupor. He felt that his own will was ridden by a will stronger than his own and he would make no move until the prick of Fate would rouse him into action. The lack of any destined goal for his own personal existence often left him miserable, alone. At such times, the mission on behalf of Lee seemed not enough. Ever he must go further from her, and if his search revealed that Captain Loo still lived, then he would be left without one to whom he might give his love. A wish, unexpressed before, raised its small malicious head. If he found that Captain Loo had died then he would return to Lee, and perhaps, who knows in the vicissitudes of war what change might come?

This hope, admitted, grew large and in the dazed thought of Takawo it assumed the certainty of fact. He would go at once and seek this man. He would speak face to face with him or he would find those who had seen him die.

He found his stiff and stubborn feet and set them in the direction of the door but as he plowed his way across the room, a girl of the town ripped her laughter in his ear. There followed scuffling of drunken men.

"Better not break into a game of shee-kou. You'll win a broken head instead of 'Sun-and-Dragon.' You might have been a hero at the front, but here you're a foreign devil!" The words clattered on his ears like hail. Three men were grinning, their teeth appeared as big as tombstones.

Takawo passed his hands over his face. Suddenly he straightened, his pride snapping to attention:

"Fair enough about the game. The 'foreign devil' is a matter of opinion. Good night!" He turned and went quickly toward the outer door.

In the streets the cold air cleared his head and he walked directly to Tien's house. He entered the garden, went to his room, and lay down upon the bed. He had not been asleep more than an hour when he was awakened by a gentle voice calling him. He opened his door and found Biu-Lin pale and breathless.

"They are waiting for you below," she whispered. "You must come at once, for you have a long journey before you. Bring the bundle."

He did not realize whom she meant by "they" but there was despite her youth and the gentleness of her voice a quality that compelled him to obey.

A half-hour later, Takawo Muto and Biu-Lin stole down the stair and out into the garden. As they reached the gate which swung open silently, the girl bade him good-by.

"You must bring us honor in all things you do," she said, and Takawo, still bewildered with sleep, touched her hands in farewell.

The gate closed behind him. In the street he found three mounted men whose faces he could not distinguish and with them one riderless horse.

"If you are sincere in your desire to join us, mount!" It was the voice of Foo-Lang.

Takawo hesitated but a moment for here was the prick of Fate he had awaited.

He flung his bundle on the horse and leaped into the saddle.

Into the darkness of the village streets, the men galloped. Muto ventured words to his companions. They did not choose to hear.

At the gate of the village, the riders drew to a sudden halt.

The voice of Foo-Lang clanged on the silence of the night. "Remember it is I who send you forth. All you do will reflect on me for good or ill. You may still turn back."

Takawo wheeled his horse so that its head faced the mysterious country that lay ahead.

"This is my answer."

"Then, farewell!" Foo-Lang turned his head sharply. "My brothers, Feng and Ho-We, will show you the way. Bring no dishonor upon me, or else the tombstone on my back will become the symbol of your fate."

"Farewell," answered Takawo.

"Fare thee well, Brother Lang," cried the guides.

Foo-Lang reëntered the village.

Three horses cantered forward into darkness.

"Are you tired?"

"A little."

"If you wish to be Mai-Sai you must learn more about horsemanship."

"That is plain. But what is that light ahead?"

"It is the light our brothers keep burning that we may not lose our way. This light is visible only from this road and it is well guarded. For the last three miles we shall be watched. You will be asked passwords."

"But I do not know them."

"I shall tell you. When a voice cries 'fire' do you answer 'water.' If a man in the darkness calls 'moon' you must reply 'sun.' Take always the opposite of what these voices cry to you. Thus you will prove yourself friendly to us. We hold that opposites meet and so in time our fraternity will encircle the whole earth."

In the silence which followed Takawo pondered these words, and true enough when they had ridden away many hours of the night Muto heard coming from those shadows that presage the dawn, the strong voice of a man crying "Sun!" To this Takawo made answer "Moon!" And later when they had gone still further he replied "Fire!" to one who in the twilight sang out "Water!"

The three men rode on and as the mists melted before them, Takawo saw they were following the dry bed of a river; and their way descended down a narrow valley between high mountains. At the far end of this valley the sky lay like the inner side of a vast sea-shell turned toward their eyes.

Between the mountains lay a village, blond as the earth in color, and surrounded by an ancient wall, crumbling as if it were weary of its state and wished to return to earth again. Above the wall, new roofs showed; and these seemed fragile as a toy.

When a silvery and chill sun began to climb the pale heavens, the three riders drew to a halt just within the wall. The two companions of Takawo leaped from their horses and paid due reverence to the God of Heaven.

"You will come to dwell with me," said the man who had given Muto counsel regarding the passwords. "My woman is called Gui; and I am named Feng. We shall rest and have refreshment, then we shall present ourselves before our Chief. Our comrade Ho-We must ride on further to the North."

Takawo bowed obedience, and followed his new host down the street which divided the village in half. Before a house of mud and stone, Feng stopped. Upon its door were characters in black; and above the roof a yellow pennant, shaped like the tongue of a dragon, assiduously licked the air.

"What is the writing on your dwelling-place?" Takawo asked.

"It is the insignia of our brotherhood, the Kin of the Everlasting Evergreen. Ours is the noblest of the Mai-Sai Brotherhood."

Feng entered his house, Takawo followed, and when the men stood within a large square room, they saw lying upon a corn-cob bed a woman broad of face and strong of body. When she beheld the two, she rose, and went silently from the room. She returned with a basin of water, indicated with a gesture that Takawo was to sit down, and when he had complied she removed his boots and washed his feet. This done, she offered him her bed.

With a bow he accepted it, and there he lay and presently, he slept. When he wakened he found water awaiting him and when he had washed completely, he dressed him-

self in the garments given him by Madam Tien in the garden of the house in the Vacation Village.

At sight of these, Feng remarked: "Your responsibility is heavy wearing the clothes of Tien-the-Great. For your own sake, I deem it best you in no way dishonor them."

Takawo thought it wise not to reply to this warning and in silence they ate, Gui serving them, and when they had had their fill, Feng spoke:

"It is not our custom to let strangers dwell among us. Let us go at once to the Chief that you may know soon whether or no we shall accept you as a brother!"

The house of Ken-jin, the Chief, was larger than any dwelling in the village and it was built, not of stone and mud, but of wood that had been charred by a straw-fire to keep out the cold of the Manchurian winter. Above its pagoda-roof, banners of red, of yellow and of green flickered in the air.

The two men entered a central door and found themselves in a high, wide room where at a carven desk sat a man whom Feng addressed as "Fuju." To him Feng imparted the purpose of their visit and this official rose and disappeared through a door at the back of the hall.

Meanwhile Takawo looked about him and saw the walls were gray in color and uneven in design and when he remarked this peculiarity to his host, Feng replied:

"These walls are thin; to keep out the cold they are pasted with newspapers, which we take from the houses of our enemies, Chinese, Japanese, European—it does not matter. To paper walls is the only fitting use for these rags."

Again Muto deemed it best to make no comment, but turned his eyes to the rugs which were hung upon the walls, and on the floor made a pathway to the dais at the far end of the room. They were of Mongolian design and beautiful in color. A red lacquer chair dominated the stage and above it, upon the wall, sparkled implements of death: here a javelin with an ebony handle bound with gold; there a three-pronged pike with silver handle and snake-skin band; above the chair to the left a long curved sword with handle of lacquer and sheath of tiger-skin.

While young Muto wondered what lives these elegant weapons might have ended, he became aware that the tapestry at one side of the dais was being slowly drawn aside and two young boys in coats of blue and carrying drawn swords, were stepping ceremonially into the hall. They walked toward the chair of red and reverently they knelt beside it as if some majesty were seated there. Softly silken garments murmured, and pacing slowly a venerable man, in mandarin coat of scarlet and of gold, entered the hall. Above his glittering body a face shrewd yet simple, old yet young, turned upon Takawo.

The Chief's lips opened with these words:

"It is best I explain to you that strangers seldom are welcomed here. Our custom is to know our men from babyhood. You are an alien to us and yet we have invited you to dwell among us; this is because we have learned of your desire to quit the life of 'hero' in the Army and to live the life of Mai-Sai, which is the true destiny of man. Because Foo-Lang has faith in you and because the wife of Tien speaks well of you, you are our guest.

"In welcoming you, we are aware that you come from the Army which is supported by poor people. They must

pay for wars whether or not they do believe in them. With us it is different; we support ourselves and take only from those who have more than they can use. It is best I make clear to you that when you come to dwell here you must do no thing which your heart does not dictate, and follow always the highest good."

Takawo raised his eyes and in a low voice asked:

"Long-lived and Wise Man, tell me what you deem to be the highest good?"

"Stand before our Sacred Pool upon the mountain and let the reflection of your face fall upon it. If no cloud pass across the water as you do so, then bless the Sun and ask his counsel, for he will show you the Highest Good. As for me, I am grown too old to go into the forest to search my heart, therefore I have a crystal ball in which I gaze to discover if any cloud rest upon my spirit. There, too, I am able to search the souls of all my people. If, alone, you cannot win counsel of the Sun, come to me and I may help you.

"As for our way of life, we obey the law of nature. Being driven further and further away from the fertile lands where we might have grown food to nourish us, we go on sallies to replenish our store.

"If the law of our brotherhood be clear to you, and if you be willing to live according to it, then to-morrow we shall hold the Ceremony of Initiation."

Takawo once more raised his eyes and spoke:

"Long-lived and Reverend Sir, I am more than willing to obey your law, but if there still remain in the corner of my sleeve a little dust from other places, if there still remain in my spirit some sediment from other ways of

thought, I beg you, Wise Teacher, to have patience with me."

"It is well," replied the Chief, "that you are sincere in spirit. Devote to-morrow morning to that Pool in the forest where Feng will take you. There you may search your heart and see if what you are about to do is with the full consent of your desire.

"Later, you will take a mate. But not until you have gone on your first expedition and tested your prowess in the games. Your skill and strength will give you choice."

Having finished, the Chief rose and while Feng and the two young boys in blue bowed their heads to the floor, the august figure in gold and red disappeared behind the tapestry.

"To-morrow we shall climb the slope of Liok-Sei, where the goats now feed among the rocks. Upon that summit lies the Blessed Pool." As the two men stepped from the house of the Chief, Feng stretched his hand toward the West.

They walked on in silence, but now Takawo saw that his host was taking him not to his abode but in an opposite direction. For this he asked a reason, and Feng replied:

"To-night is the Night of the Bath. Presently you will refresh your body and see many of our people."

"But what does your Chief mean when he speaks of choosing a mate?"

"With us a boy wins a mate as soon as he is sixteen; if you know nothing of choosing a mate, it is better you wait till later."

As they went forward, there came toward them a procession of women carrying clattering cans attached to

ropes swinging over breasts and backs. All wore the Manchurian leathern-jackets; some had trousers of skin, others of khaki, and still others, Western trousers of striped wool. Takawo watched this procession come near, amused and puzzled at the incongruity of their clothes and the vessels which they carried: American kerosene cans outnumbering the hand-modeled bowls decorated with Mongolian design.

He turned to Feng: "Tell me why these women wear clothes of such diverse origin and carry cans of 'fat-of-the-stone'?"

"Their clothes come from various houses we have raided. Into 'fat-of-the-stone' cans our women pour 'source of the earth.' With winter the bitter time of drought will come unless they bring large supplies from the spring on the Sacred Mountain."

"Is that the spring where we shall go to-morrow?"

"No, their spring is further down the mountain; where we go no woman goes; at times they are unclean."

The procession had come quite close, so close indeed that Takawo could distinguish talk that was going on between two women who were walking before the others. He was aware they stared at him and took no care to soften the sound of their voices:

"Who is that man with the strange, straight legs who walks with our Brother Feng?" The woman who spoke was broad of face, flat of feature, and stalwart in the thighs.

To her the other replied: "He may have ridden camels but never horses. It is easy to see he is an alien to us."

"Beware!" shouted Feng, turning upon the women, "this man is our guest and mayhap to-morrow he will be one of

us. Later he may win the games and choose you for mate. Then he can make you regret what now you say!"

All the women but one raised their eyes and looked sharply at Takawo. The woman who had spoken first grinned broadly:

"What? Do you tell us, Brother Feng, that he has taken the oaths?"

"No, not yet, but soon he may, for our Chief has welcomed him." Feng touched Muto on the arm and began to draw him slowly away but Takawo lingered because he had caught sight of a girl whose face was downcast, whose mien was lovely. Muto took a few steps so he might observe her at his ease and found the glimpse he had of her was fulfilled richly by the long scrutiny. Her snug skin trousers and close, short jacket revealed the outline of a body more slender than those of the other women; her skin was fairer; her features high; her hair a deep red-brown. Indeed, her eyes alone seemed Mongolian, and these darted at him from time to time such plaintive glances of curiosity that he felt he must remain there to speak with her no matter how ridiculous this action might seem to Feng and the other women.

With this desire strong within him, he took a step in her direction, when suddenly he felt a strong hand upon his shoulder. He was pulled back abruptly.

"Beware the willow for it is slender and you will hang in it as a man hangs upon a tree." It was the voice of Feng in his ear.

A giggle rippled down the ranks of the women and Takawo began walking quickly away. Feng was at his side and when they had achieved a space between themselves and the procession, spoke:

"Let your desire turn where there is hope of fulfillment. Nadja is of Russian blood and belongs to a Sage. The song of the whip on a young man's shoulders would be to him the sweetest music."

Takawo glanced at his host but that strong leathern face was devoid of expression.

"Then she, too, is exiled," Takawo murmured to himself.

The House of the Bath was plastered with the orange-colored clay of Mongolia. From a small pagoda-shaped chimney steam smelling of muei-tow and of human bodies was wafted by a wind that was sharp and fitful.

Within the building the steam was a thick mist. When Takawo entered with Feng, he could make out nothing but the sullen glare of two lamps on either side the door. Slowly his eyes accustomed themselves to that malodorous twilight and he recognized nude men and women walking close about him.

Feng plucked Takawo's sleeve and directed his steps toward a wooden platform. While Feng removed his clothes Muto looked through the gray curtains of the steam at a pool below in which some twenty men and women were sitting and standing.

"Take off your clothes!" The voice of Feng was impatient. Slowly, Takawo obeyed.

The odor of steam and of bodies was now so strong that he felt a sickness creeping up within his flesh. Moreover, he was aware of a nausea of the spirit also. He felt himself profoundly cheated: not so, nor in such a place, had he dreamed of seeing women unclothed. Though in his

native land nude men and women bathed together, Takawo did not feel himself at ease in such a setting, for his childhood on the Island of Go-Go had been strangely isolated from the customs of his people.

To his castle-home young men and maidens came but once a year and then they occupied the hours writing poems which with fall of night they transformed to sails for tiny boats and set them traveling on a lake within the compass of the Sacred Garden.

On that magic evening the most delicious sentiments were conveyed by the faint touching of sleeve upon sleeve and the climax of this shy feast of youth came when in candle-flames the poems flared, staining the limpid lake with scarlet conflagration. He whose poem did not burn might win the lady of his heart!

Now from this tender beauty of his boyhood, a beauty whose perfume was poignant because it was ever linked with pain of parting, Takawo was exiled. The gracious and haunting Lee-Kwan-Tien had roused hope that this beauty might be caught in the fabric of his days; but she had been taken from him and now his thoughts turned to her he had seen in the procession. He resented these lusty naked women, for his eyes longed to behold one more fragile, tender, lovely—a girl who might resemble Lee.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he had undressed; and reluctantly, as if the floor were icy, he set his feet upon the wooden platform surrounding the Pool. Here groups of men and women talked and laughed together. On their arms women carried little baskets containing pumice-stones, bags of rice-husks, and figured towels from Nippon. Men gave to the women bowls filled with hot water that flowed into the Pool; women scrubbed

the backs of men with little rice-bags from their baskets.

Cautiously, Takawo found a corner of a bench near the Pool and there sat down. Hunched up like a sage, he watched men and women walking through the steam. He chided himself for his delicacies: these bodies were strong and sound and their common bathing a matter of course. If only the place of bathing had been beautiful! . . .

Suddenly he became aware of the laughter of young men. Wet towels bombarded him. Feng cried in his ear:

"Best get into the Pool or else be thrown in!"

Takawo obeyed and sat down within the Pool on a bench that was half-submerged in water.

By following Feng's advice he had removed himself from the notice of others and could listen to talk that went on between two young men near him.

"I wish I might be old enough to get the honor of the first bath-water."

The youth who spoke was rubbing himself with a rice-bag which exuded a white milky fluid as it passed over his skin.

"You are always wishing for the hottest water; you are getting as weak as a teacher."

"It is not the hottest water but the privileges of age that I desire. That beautiful Russian girl lives in the house of a Sage. Would not old age be rewarded if one might possess her?"

Takawo listened, certain though no name had been mentioned, they were speaking of the girl he had seen that day in the procession.

The young men went on: "But if you were old you would not have the pleasure of her a young man might have."

"True enough. You think she is still a virgin?"

"It is not yet her seventeenth birthday and her mother made that law. I think Sage Rikoo-sieu has kept it faithfully."

"Seventeen is too advanced an age for a virgin; by that time our women already have had many mates. Her Mother was a strange woman to make that law!"

"But I am told Nadja passed the moon at an age later than is customary among us. Nevertheless she is the most lovely of them all!"

Takawo did not wish to listen further. He turned and with gratitude and relief, met Feng's eyes.

"You must dress now and return home. To-morrow we have a long journey before us. I looked out of the door and beheld a great circle about the moon. It is best we hasten, for the cold wind of the desert will soon blow down."

Within the half-hour the two men were walking in the direction of Feng's dwelling. As they went forward Takawo raised his eyes toward the sky and observed it shone with exceeding brilliance and many stars were visible. There was no wind.

"You told me of the chill blast that would blow down upon us," he remarked, "I do not feel it."

"It is not yet come but presently when we lie upon our beds you will hear it crying outside the walls. And now, look you, within the circle of the moon ride two stars. This bodes no good for our next sally."

Feng hastened his step but Takawo lingered, wishing to speak of a matter close his heart:

"Tell me in your journeys of Mai-Sai, have you heard of a man by the name of Captain Kin-Loo?"

Feng turned sharply: "Yes, I have heard of him. My hope is you will fare better than he."

"Then he was here?"

"He broke our law and was exiled from the Kin of the Eternal Pine. He has gone toward the West."

"Do you know where?"

"The name of a man exiled from among us brings evil if it pass our lips. Ask me no more!"

And Feng's face was set in the direction of the pale and strangely luminous sky.

They walked on silently; Takawo filled with a fear of danger threatening Lee, and of frustration in his quest on her behalf.

When at last they had closed the door of Feng's house, Muto heard the first whistling of a wind.

On the following morning at the hour of the rising of the sun Feng and Takawo rode from the village in the direction of Mount Liok-Sei. They had bathed and purified themselves and had made greeting to the God of Heaven, who even now was climbing the blue sky across which great fleets of clouds were sailing before the wind. They had gone some miles outside the village walls and were at the foot of the Sacred Slope when Feng dismounted.

"The rest of the journey will be made by watching our toes. The climb is steep."

Takawo dismounted but before he turned his face toward the rocky height above him, he let his eyes wander toward the village so similar to the bare earth in tawny color it was scarcely distinguishable from it.

"Tell me, Brother Feng, why it is your roofs are so new, your village walls so old?"

Feng followed the direction of Takawo's gaze:

"Our village has not always belonged to the Kin of the Everlasting Evergreen. How ancient it is I cannot say but I think it very old. The wall was built to keep out wild beasts as well as human enemies. In recent times it has been the home of our people who come here when they are driven from more eastern and more fertile soil. It is a periodic refuge and those new roofs are made by us who feel we never remain in any place long enough to build with stone. . . . But what are you trying to do?"

"I am fastening my horse."

"It may be the horses of the Army can be held in this fashion, but not our horses. Do it so."

The knot Feng made seemed sealed forever. With a smile Takawo acknowledged his lack of skill and the two men began the ascent of the Sacred Mountain.

As they climbed, certain words of Feng's echoed in young Muto's mind and set thoughts jangling in a bitter tune. His host had said: "Those new roofs are made by us who feel we never remain in any place long enough to build with stone. . . ." Takawo then added to himself:

"I may be brother to this man and to his Kin not by grace of ritual alone, but by the hand of destiny as well, for we are exiles all. I, too, dare not remain in any place long enough to build with stone. Even more than they, for custom clothes their exile with religion, I am blown before chance winds. Who knows, if I could lose myself in their common tribal life, I might for a little space, dispel this lonely ghost that walks ever at my side?

"Surely, too, the Kin of the Eternal Pine has gathered wisdom. They worship the Sun, father to all gods; they seek 'the highest good'; and desire all men to follow the dictates of their hearts. How unlike the daily discipline of

the Army, where authority drips down from an unseen fount and falling on humble heads below, congeals to iron—and irony."

Thoughts, such as these, lifted Takawo from consciousness of time and he was not aware how far they'd gone until Feng, of a sudden, walked rapidly ahead and at an abrupt turn in the road, disappeared. Takawo followed and found at last that he stood upon the summit of the mountain.

Before him a precipitous rock towered high into the air; it was pointed at its top and resembled these stone altars in the portraits of the saints and sages. Below it was a pool or spring; which, Takawo could not tell because the water was rippled over by the breath of the restless wind. Here grew an ancient pine and sheltered by it, a younger tree. An age-bitten and weather-beaten stump was near the sapling. Beside the altar-rock stones were piled carelessly together, as if some great heedless hand had let them fall. Beyond this pile, the mountain fell away and no tree grew. Below, and like another world the blond valley wound its narrow length.

Slowly Takawo approached the Pool, the while a curious chill passed over him. Feng had disappeared, and the very desolation of the place was a monition that an august and fearful spirit dwelt here. The cold wind momentarily shattering itself against the face of the stone altar, the rhythmic rippling of the water: these alone could not have caused the awe which now possessed him.

Suddenly from a place unseen, the voice of Feng cried out:

"I must remain hidden from your eyes. Seat yourself upon the ancient stump under the branches of the Sacred

Tree. Gaze into the Pool and when your reflection shows clear then do you call me and I shall know that you have endured the trial and are prepared to become blood-brother to our Kin."

Takawo obeyed the voice and seated himself under the tall pine. He bent forward mirroring his face within the water. As he did so, he saw it would be a matter of the merest chance to behold his reflection clear therein, for the day was so high-blown and windy it seemed impossible to get an unshadowed vision of his face. Indeed his image appeared the frailest thing in all the world for the ripples passing across the surface of the water were broken constantly by the shiver of the wind. He felt himself ephemeral and shorn of the illusion of his personal significance; his soul, at that moment tremulous as a child's, sped toward the refuge of the past. So ardent was his need of human love that the face of his Mother blossomed from the depths of the water and trembled shyly on the surface of the Sacred Spring.

His spirit had not cried in vain and now it evoked another woman's face, strangely like yet far younger than his Mother's; the features of the sorrowful and beautiful Lee-Kwan-Tien mingled themselves with his own and as he gazed, caught in a trance of recollection, he became confused, he trembled and grew momently more chill.

It was then Takawo was startled to find within the Pool a vision more real and colorful than all the rest. So living was it he remained stupefied and enthralled by what he saw. The face of the Russian girl who had walked in the procession looked at him from the water's depths and as he gazed she seemed to smile at him with an ineffable sweetness, but so shadowed were her eyes he was reminded

again of Lee's infinite patience and the smile she had given him as she had told the story of her exile.

While he fixed his gaze upon this vision, it disappeared. Convinced this was no mere shadow of his thought but the reflection of a living girl, he looked about him, but no human creature was visible. Bewildered and troubled strangely, he called Feng who came to him at once:

"Tell me, is it possible women come here to consult the waters of this Pool?"

"It is impossible. What you have seen is but the shadow of your evil thought. Look again within the spring; you must free yourself of such visions before you become one of us."

Again Feng went apart and again Takawo bent toward the water. He knew that no matter how long he might remain there, thought of Nadja would not pass from him and he was relieved therefore when between the flight of clouds a serene sky shone forth and in the pure reflection of this heaven, he saw himself unshadowed.

He called Feng:

"My face shows clear though still my heart is dark. Can it be said I have endured the test?"

"The Pool knows all!" said Feng. "You may descend with me and I shall tell our Chief you are prepared."

It was not until they were again crossing the bridge near the foot of the mountain that Takawo spoke:

"You tell me no woman may go near our Sacred Pool?"

"No woman may touch the Sacred Water," Feng replied.

Takawo rode on in silence. He deemed it wise not to tell his host that when he had raised his eyes to see if the face

within the Pool might not be the reflection of a living girl he had heard a footfall behind the rocks and a pebble had rolled toward him, making a little sound.

In the pitiless light of a noon-sun, the two men rode back toward the village of Den-Hoo. Scarcely had they come within the gate when they were met by a man of many years. At first he seemed not to notice the riders but when he was close he addressed himself to Feng:

"Brother, you have the dust of the mountain upon your feet. Tell me, have you been on a long journey?"

"Honored Sage, even now we return from the Sacred Pool. This young man who is our guest has gone with me to the Holy Spring to discover if he be ready to become one with us."

The old man turned his eyes upon Takawo but he continued to address himself to Feng:

"And is your companion pure of heart?"

"Venerable Master, he is ready to become blood-brother to us. Though at first he saw within the Pool the face of a girl this reflection of evil disappeared and at last his image upon the water was clear of shadow."

The old man's eyes searched young Muto even more intently; then he spoke, the words cautious on his lips:

"The face of a girl? Did she resemble one of our maidens?"

"In nowise, Reverend Sire, and I am told by Feng that no woman is allowed near that holy place."

"Feng is right, yet it is strange, for I am seeking Nadja and have sought her many hours."

"This reflection was a mere fancy of my eyes." Takawo stared solemnly before him.

Once more the Sage fixed his gaze upon the young man. Then he turned and without further speech walked in the direction of the gate through which they had entered.

"Sage Rikoo-sieu is the guardian of the girl you saw in the procession," Feng remarked as they spurred their horses and cantered down the street in the direction of his dwelling-house.

Within doors Gui awaited them with clean water and with food. When they had washed and eaten, Feng said to his mate:

"If you have a jacket that is clean and fresh, let me wear it, for at present I am ill-clothed for ceremony."

The woman went at once into another room and returned with a Manchurian vest, neatly sewn.

"This garment that I bring you, husband," she said, holding up the vest to him, "is precious. Guard it carefully that I may have it back again. I hope some day I may put it on my son and he will wear it with all honor."

Feng looked at her sharply:

"Why do you choose this time to speak of a son? This is the first I have heard of him."

Gui raised her serene face and smiled:

"This morning while you were upon the mountain I went to the House of the Elder Women and out of their wisdom they told me there was no doubt but that the Moon has brought me a treasure. Counting back the months I know you to be the father."

Feng gazed into the eyes that were upraised to his:

"No doubt, you are right, for the last three times I have chosen you."

"That has been my pride, husband. You have been hero in many games and each time you have taken me. But soon, alas, I must bid you farewell. To-morrow you will set forth upon an expedition and when you return I shall be gone to dwell among the Elder Women. When you return you must choose yourself another mate."

"I should deem myself blessed if I might wait for you."

Gui smiled slowly: "That you know is impossible, for I shall be gone at least a year to nurse my child. You cannot be deprived that long."

Without further speech, she put the vest upon her husband and with a parting caress of her hand upon his back, she walked from the room.

The sunlight out-of-doors was keen and brilliant, but within the house of Ken-Jin, great candles burned. The red chair of the Chief was empty, but on either side kneeled young boys in blue. As before, they held bare swords aloft. Below the platform and in silence, sages stood: their garments black and golden, their queues touching the hems of their august attire.

They faced a table where, wrapped in white, a dagger lay. The point protruded.

At the door the Fuju met Takawo and Feng. He went before them to the table.

Footsteps slowly made silken rustle behind the tapestry upon the stage. The old men turned their faces toward the chair of red.

Chief Ken-Jin entered. He wore his coat of gold and black; he moved across the platform and took his place within the chair. When the Chief spoke, silence seemed to

have found itself a voice, so harmoniously did his words steal upon the air:

"I am told that when you gazed into the Sacred Pool, evil haunted you and clouds sailed across the heaven of your face. But with prayer and with the aid of the holy altar upon our Sacred Mountain, you came at last to purity and the clean heart. Is this the truth?"

Takawo looked up and saw the wise-simple eyes of that ancient face turned to him.

"I am prepared," was his answer.

At this, the Fuju stepped forward and from its sheath of paper, took the dagger. This he gave to Feng. Feng stretched out his arm, unstripped it of its sleeve, and offered the weapon to Takawo. With this gesture came the words:

"Since you are younger than I, it is my honor to receive your blood first. This done, I shall offer you mine. Thus do we become blood-brothers and through this union are made kin to all men under the Sign of the Everlasting Evergreen!"

The Fuju stepped to Takawo's side. With a quick twist of his hand, he bared Takawo's arm, took the dagger from Feng and grasped the weapon firmly, and with a lightning deftness of his wrist the Fuju cut the flesh of Takawo's arm so blood oozed forth in a little scarlet bubble. Feng strode forward, bent close, put his lips to the wound, sucked the blood and swallowed it. With a flourish of his arm, he snatched the dagger from the Fuju; with a smile baring his teeth, he cut a gash in his own arm. Blood flowed. Feng fixed his eyes upon Takawo. Pride and affection flashed within his eyes.

Takawo bent forward, put his lips to Feng's wound, sucked his "Brother's" blood and swallowed it.

The Chief rose. The boys in blue lowered their drawn swords, stood upon their feet.

Ken-Jin spoke:

"You have endured the test and are bound to us with scarlet ropes. In time these ties that make our fraternity will encompass the whole earth. Glorious, no longer exiled, the Kin of the Eternal Pine will live! So now—begone! The days to come will further test your strength!"

His eyes, which had been closed the while he had addressed Takawo, opened. He made slow steps away and presently the Bandit-Lord disappeared behind the tapestry.

Takawo swayed a little as he walked beside his friend down the deep blue street of the Mai-Sai Village.

Next morning when the sun had risen, scattering the bitter cold of the Manchurian night, the street outside Feng's house held festival in preparation for a raid.

Gui had boiled and dried chestnuts and as she sat on the doorstep in the sunlight that was surprisingly warm and contrasted with the keenness of the night, she busied herself by shelling them. As her hands moved she talked with her husband who was standing near, fastening the saddle upon his horse.

"I have only one wish for my boy-child," she was saying when Takawo joined them upon the doorstep.

"And what is that?" asked Muto, knowing her desire was to be questioned.

"That he be like the kurumé-nut: harsh without and

tender within. Then he will be like his father." She smiled at Feng and he smiled with her.

"Tell me," Takawo ventured, "how is it you are certain your child will be a boy? Has some magic informed you?"

"No, but I wish it so, else my child will be sent away when she becomes grown. Our daughters may not remain here, but are sent to another tribe of Mai-Sai."

"That is because," Feng put in, "our people in this way prevent mating between brother and sister, father and daughter. All women here come from other villages. My mate is from Koo-Kon-Sho. They are all barbarians, but I have civilized her." He laughed heartily and his wife with him.

Takawo smiled and was about to question Gui further when he perceived the street was filling rapidly, that men and women were hastening from their doors, that baggage was being strapped to backs of horses.

"Time for farewell draws near," Feng remarked, glancing at Gui. She nodded and bent lower over the nuts in her lap.

"Are you ready, Brother?" Feng turned to Takawo.

For answer the young man fastened his baggage and leaped upon his horse. Feng leaped upon his.

"Who knows if I shall see either of you again?" Gui had gotten to her feet, was smiling bravely.

"You will see me again, Mate. If evil befall me you have only to await the Treasure from the Moon. In him I shall live again!"

Between Feng and Gui passed a tender parting glance. Then the man turned his horse in the direction of the square at the end of the street.

"Come to the ceremony for a last farewell," cried Feng

as his horse clattered hoofs upon the resounding stones before the threshold of his home.

Gui waved her hand in refusal.

"Farewell makes heavy burden." She smiled, wheeled sharply, and walked into the house.

To the picket-fence that surrounded the square the men of the Everlasting Evergreen were tethering their horses at the moment when Feng and Takawo cantered into that ceremonial place. Presently and with one accord all men moved toward the center of the ground and seated themselves cross-legged in a wide-flung crescent that faced a long platform on which was pitched a tent of Mongolian design gay with patchings of many colors.

The tent was open and Chief Ken-Jin sat within. On either side of the stage old men were ranged, dressed as their Chief, in robes of black and yellow. Above their heads, banners of blue, of red, of yellow, rode the air.

Upon the ground, before his Lord, the Fuju stood, with horizontal bar extending from his hat; the black and golden robe enveloping him seemed a wave rising from the earth bearing his head upon its crest.

Behind the Fuju, two musicians with instruments of brass stood with spines stiff and arms alert.

At a signal from their Chief, the Fuju read a proclamation. Then cymbals thrust back the air in broken ripples. The bandits bowed their heads to earth, the Chief spoke:

"My men, you are boatmen who guide your boats on streams of chance. You are exiles ever and for this reason our dead must not be left where strangers may put upon them unkind, unholy hands. Our dead are sacred and must

be restored to our own kin, else their spirits will range forever the regions of the living and appear wherever we may set our eyes.

"Remember, too, that upon our last sally, Landowner Hee-Chin defied our will. In our note we warned him we would have no mercy if he did not leave the Lady Tei-Joo in peace and safety. Unless he will obey this command, we must enact our threat.

"In the field below the Great Elm three of your brothers will meet you. They are leaders of that company who have gone ahead. Take counsel with them, and according to their discoveries determine what is to be done."

Again the bandits touched their foreheads to the ground; again the cymbals shivered.

The Chief continued: "Now let our sisters come!"

A drum snarled. Men rose, the formation of the crescent broke in two; as a flying wedge of birds within the sky, the women of the Everlasting Evergreen swarmed upon the field and took their places inside the ranks of men.

Once more the Chief lifted up his voice:

"Sisters, to-day and within this hour your men are leaving. If you have suffered wrong at their hands this is the appointed hour to speak so that all may know their shame."

Excitement quivered over those assembled. At last a woman stood upon her feet. She did not raise her eyes and addressed the Chief in a timid, lagging voice:

"Honorable Lord, when my mate took me I thought he did so through his own desire; but being a weak man and unable to win the games, he was one of the last to choose. Now I believe he preferred another, for on the first night when he touched my august body he said that Chu, his last mate, had a skin as soft as the inner side of the egg-

shell and because of this she had given him the Sentiment of Paradise. Then he complained my skin gave him no such feeling. For two moons he has not kept me warm and I have suffered greatly from the cold."

The Chief turned his face from right to left. His voice threatened:

"Where is this feeble worm?"

From the ranks of the bandits a young man rose and faced the platform.

"Is what Ho-Lien says, true?"

"It is true, Lord."

"Do you still think of your last mate?"

"I do, Venerable Master, for Chu was my first woman. Perhaps we met under some secret sign of the moon, perhaps we were mated centuries before we were born into this world. It was not only in our bodies we rejoiced but in all things; and when we parted I felt my flesh was cut in two. I am certain she felt as I."

The Chief continued:

"Let Chu stand up and face us."

A woman young in years and comely of face and body rose from among the others.

"Say if what has been told is true?"

"It is indeed true, Master; though Gan-Poo is not strong in body, he gave strength to my heart. It may be he cannot win in games and combats, but to me he is a hero above all others. I cannot forget him. If he cannot choose me when he returns from this sally, I would retire to dwell among the women who have grown old, and there devote myself to children and the sick. Grant me, Lord, this small desire."

For many moments the Chief remained silent; then he

glanced at the sages as if inviting them to speak their thought. Finally an old man raised his voice:

"If Chu be mated with another man soon she will forget Gan-Poo and this will be the better for them both. To deprive her of mates were a rash injustice to her woman's nature. Let her remain among those women from whom our brothers can choose freely. In time she will become resigned, perhaps content."

The Chief did not answer, but continued looking about him as if awaiting further counsel. But no one vouchsafed a word. At last Ken-Jin spoke:

"You have heard, Chu, the wisdom of our greatest sage. You must remain among the women from whom our men can choose freely."

Turning to the young man the Chief continued:

"Above all, Gan-Poo, strengthen your body. Then your heart will be less tender. Remain at home. Do not go forth upon this expedition. During the flight of the Sun across the heavens, labor where iron shoes are made for horses, and at sundown seek the Sacred Spring for purification. When six weeks have passed, come to me and we shall speak further of your fate."

With bowed heads Chu and Gan-Poo accepted their destiny. After a little pause in which whispers buzzed within the ranks, the girl and man sat down.

"Are there any other women who would speak?" The Chief searched the faces of his people.

No woman rose.

The Chief went on: "The Sun stands overhead. The journey is long! Men! you must leave shortly. Carry sufficient water. Sisters, prepare!"

The women crowded to the picket-fence, untied the reins, returned, each leading a horse.

While men and women were making passionate farewells, Takawo was left alone in the midst of the field. Then the Chief beckoned him and he went to the platform. Ken-Jin spoke:

"If you live, return to us! But above all, fulfill your duty. Its nature you'll learn later!"

Takawo bowed.

The Chief ordered a horse and Muto mounted.

Now the Lord of Mai-Sai rose, came from his tent and stood upon the edge of the platform. With a sweep of his great sleeve, Ken-Jin raised his arm:

"Tot-Shin!"

Cymbals and drums struck the air.

"Tot-Shin!" the bandits cried.

With plumes of dust floating at their horses' heels, the men were gone into the sunlight of a brilliant noon.

In that secret and still hour that comes between the dying of day and the birth of night, Takawo, riding somewhat behind the others, perceived upon a slope some distance ahead, silhouettes of men and horses moving about a fire at the foot of a tall elm tree, and deemed this to be the place of rendezvous. Here his Mai-Sai brothers dismounted and he with them. From the shadows a man stepped whom Takawo recognized. It was Ho-We, who together with Feng had brought him from the Vacation-Village of Soo-Loo to the Bandit-Camp.

Ho-we took his place in the flickering light of the fire

about which the men had gathered and in these words addressed them:

"Brothers, we have sent a message to Hee-Chin in Bei-Chio. By this time he has received it. Presently we shall divide into two companies; one shall go ahead and start a fire. Under cover of confusion that will follow, the second shall surround Hee-Chin's dwelling. If he still refuses to give up the Lady Tai-Joo, we shall let sing our bows.... Brothers, the Pledging Bowl!"

It was brought. Ho-We took the vessel in his hands and resting his eyes upon his men, continued:

"This water from our Holy Mountain pledges our oath of courage. What we do hereafter determines the fate of the Brotherhood of the Eternal Evergreen; no shameful act nor cowardly deed may soil him who drinks from this!"

He drank, handed the cup to the man next him. Thus the bowl was passed about the circle. Again Ho-We raised his voice announcing the company would divide at once into two sections, the first to proceed at once to the Village of Bei-Chio; the second to follow later. Then in turn he spoke to each man, imposing on him special task or duty. To Muto he spoke thus:

"Because this is your first sally you will guard the box of the Medicine-Man. Observe the methods of our attack. See that no dead or injured are left behind in the House of Hee-Chin. This second duty is most sacred. To fail is death! Remember the tombstone on Foo-Lang's back!" Then turning once more to the assembled men:

"Our meeting-place the Well! And now, Tot-Shin!"

"Tot-Shin!" the men replied.

Within that same hour the second company departed, proceeding far more slowly than the first for they were

dressed as firemen and were equipped with ladders, ropes and hooks.

Young Muto found himself riding beside a venerable man with thin beard and drooping mustaches. His garment was long and about his neck he wore a string of bone beads. Black lacquer boxes of large dimension were strapped to his saddle.

To him Takawo spoke:

"Tell me, Reverend Elder, are these the medicine-boxes I am destined to guard?"

"Were better you guard horses than boxes. You are too young!" The voice of the ancient man crackled like dry grass.

"I am no doubt young and unskilled in the arts of Mai-Sai yet it would seem more difficult to guard horses than boxes."

"These boxes are no use without me; why should you guard them?"

Takawo ignored this question, deeming it wise to turn the talk along another path:

"Honorable Master, tell me why it is this company resembles a fire-brigade?"

"Should we go into the village as Mai-Sai and spend the morrow with our heads stuck upon poles?"

The young man pondered these words. In the darkness through which they rode, a bitter companion was better than none. The other riders of the company went on more swiftly. The old man and himself, being less capable in the saddle, trailed behind.

Muto lifted up his voice again:

"Are there no friends of Mai-Sai in the village?"

A cackling of derision was his answer. Then slowly, unwilling words followed:

"Whence come these ladders, hooks and ropes? You are like most men not born to Mai-Sai. You believe in scattered camps alone we dwell. Though we are exiles from a settled dwelling, know that our brotherhood honeycombs all China. We have friends in every village but the police must reap their harvest of bandit-heads, else count it a lean year. Friends in the Village of Bei-Chio gave us these uniforms of firemen. Many there are who hate that man we go to capture or destroy!"

Now the Sage stared so intently before him young Muto refrained from further talk. Takawo followed the direction of the old man's gaze and saw at no great distance the swaying of many lights. At the same time bells began to sound; now one, now another, until the night was swinging with the music. Takawo was uneasy, for these hundred lights walking on the air seemed insect creatures of gigantic size, who might disdain the barriers of time and space and swoop with fiends' intent upon the cavalcade lumbering slowly through the darkness.

Takawo glanced at the Medicine-Man. The face of the old man was serene.

For half an hour more the company rode on. Suddenly their way turned and the bandits passed through an immense gate and came at once into a shadowed street with here and there a lamp burning in a shop.

The striding lights were gone, but then with the crossing of a street, they were visible again, and clearly.

The lights were carried by a hundred men dressed in black and white. Some carried hand-lanterns; others long poles with lamps suspended from the tops.

They paid no heed to the cavalcade of Mai-Sai but went their way in an easterly direction. Takawo breathed more easily and turned to his venerable companion:

"Tell me, Sire, who were these men who passed us and passed, unseeing?"

"Have you not seen the procession of sympathizers for a fire?"

"But to whom do they offer sympathy?"

"To those whose house is burning, to those people whose house our first company has looted."

"But they go so slowly, do they not wish to put out the fire?"

"That is not their duty. They leave cards to show their sorrow at the loss come upon their friends."

"But does no one come to rescue victims?"

"There are no victims. Our men have saved them all. The village fire-brigade will go in time to save a few sticks. These men thought us the fire-brigade. Therefore we came through untouched."

The Mai-Sai company proceeded through the streets deserted save for an occasional vendor and rode out at last upon an open Square where a roofed stone-wall occupied the center. About it horses were tied and Takawo understood they belonged to his Mai-Sai brothers. But not one of the first group of bandits was visible.

The cavalcade dismounted, fastened their horses near the others, and without a word proceeded quickly toward the West and down a narrow street that made a right-angle to the Square. The Medicine-Man and Takawo followed, but more slowly, for the steps of the old man held them back.

They came up that little street in time to see a comrade scale a roofed wall. There the bandit took his stand and raised bow and arrow to position. The arrow had been pushed through a white paper.

The man's arm was taut; his fingers opened, the string sang, the arrow leaped. Silence lay behind the wall. The bandit-archer leaped back into the street.

A crowd of villagers had gathered and Takawo, pondering their passiveness toward the invading Mai-Sai, recalled the words of the Medicine-Man: "Many there are who hate him whom we go to capture or destroy."

Contemplation was banished. From behind the wall came noise of many persons moving among shrubbery and presently a little man in long robe and immense sleeves presented himself upon the roof. He faced the bandits and the crowd; bowed, tucked his little hands inside his sleeves and addressed the enemy in a voice gentle and ingratiating:

"You are aware that I must be as loyal to my Lord as the horse-fly to the horse's tail! Therefore I am constrained to confess to you that if you enter here you must do so over my dead heart!"

Ho-We stepped forward:

"Since you are steward to Hee-Chin and with him have robbed the poor you are like the horse-fly attached to the Devil's Steed. You must die with him!"

He let fly an arrow. With an absurd bow the little man collapsed, then straightened sharply, his face festooned in a smile of agony. Next he let fly his immense sleeves as if he would take flight upon the air and suddenly slid backward, fell, disappeared into the pit of darkness. Then came the thud of a body striking ground.

"Na-mu-au-mee-da!" from his belly Ho-We tore the cry.

The men of Mai-Sai flung their hooked ladders over the wall. They scaled it, but their way was not clear, for servants of the household met them on the roof. Enemies embraced for hatred's sake; knives sheathed themselves in flesh; blood ran in rivulets. Men swayed, spun headlong into the street; slid, crashed into the garden.

For some minutes, the companies seemed matched evenly, then a group of bandits acting with a single strength pushed their opponents from the roof into the darkness behind the wall.

Mai-Sai men leaped after them. Presently the great oaken door of the outer gate began to open slowly.

The bandits who had remained in the street catapulted forward. Takawo was about to dart into the shadows when a hand grasped his shoulder and the voice of the Medicine-Man filled his ear:

"Stay! For your duty is to protect the chests of magic. Your turn for courage will come later."

Takawo paused, for suddenly, from within the gate, jetted a woman's cry:

"If you take my father, you must take me too!"

The voice of Ho-We made the answer:

"With you we have no concern; Lady Tei-Joo will go with you to safety; Hee-Chin alone is our enemy."

The voices faded and there appeared in the dim light of the street-lamps two young women in luxurious night-attire, the one tottering on tiny feet; the other, gliding gracefully beside the first. Their faces were not visible, for the first had sunk her head upon her breast and the second had

turned to her companion as if to comfort her. They were followed closely by two bandits who led them down the street towards a house the lights of which were faintly visible.

The apparition of two women in costume which indicated they had been torn from bed put a hush upon the crowd and upon the combatants, but when they were lost in darkness, fury once more raised its din.

Again the sound of bodies fighting; again the clash of weapons. Then silence, and a man of middle age and dressed in night-gown of gold embroidery was dragged forward between two Mai-Sai.

The prisoner was talking volubly and now and then jerked an arm as if to free himself. Ho-We stepped to the gate and nodded to the Medicine-Man who at once drummed upon his chests of magic. Then sounded the clatter of horses' hoofs and from the shadow of the street came two bandits, bringing with them a riderless horse. Upon this the master of the stricken house was put and bound.

The crowd jeered. The prisoner bowed his head. The guards wheeled their horses toward the Square and rode off into the darkness. So quickly did the bandits leave the scene of pillage that within a few seconds Takawo found himself marooned in the midst of men whose faces he did not know. Not even the Medicine-Man was near.

Takawo threaded his way among the villagers, got clear of them, and ran rapidly after his Mai-Sai brothers. As he emerged from the street and was about to cross the Square the moon rode free of clouds. He saw his comrades at the well. They had leaped upon their horses and even as he took frantic steps toward them, men and horses

streamed away, out of the Square, and passed swiftly toward the East.

He ran at once to the well. He went to that corner where he had tethered his horse. It, too, was gone. He stood alone.

Over the house-tops clouds hung low; but in the high heavens a serene moon shone and a myriad of stars sparkled. So still was that space in which he stood it seemed silence had sucked in her breath.

But this was shattered presently, for the thunder of hoofs reverberated in the ground. Takawo drew back into the shadow of the well. The sound left the earth, rode upon the air. The darkness at the mouth of the little street, scene of the combat, became alive with men, with horses. They turned in that narrow lane as a great river churns when it is constrained between too narrow banks. Then the flood hurled itself upon the Square and spread as mighty waters rush into a sea. They made an island of the well. To its wall, Takawo clung.

The river of men, of horses swirled by. Weapons, upraised, gleamed under the moon.

Takawo sagged, for he recognized the uniforms of the Military Police.

The stream of men ebbed by, sucking its thunder after it. Distance grew. From the borders of the village came the sound of conflict.

This, too, had its end and once more Muto stood alone.

"Your turn for courage may come later."

The Medicine-Man had spoken truly.

"The police must reap their harvest of bandit-heads or count it a lean year."

The police had sped past him and he had remained unseen.

"Know that our brotherhood honeycombs all China."

If he could turn to some villager friendly to the Kin of the Everlasting Evergreen. But where to go in this silent and solitary space? House-roofs were silvered with the moon, and so still they were, they seemed to sink for rest into the earth. Under these roofs there was no answer to his need.

He searched within himself. Somewhere he must find security from the panic in his blood. Feverishly he groped through the twilight of his fear. There dimly but withal steadily, the beacon of duty burned. His senses sped and took refuge at that light. In recollection he heard the voice of Ho-We commanding him:

"Because this is your first sally your duty will be to guard the box of the Medicine-Man . . . and secondly you will see that no dead or injured are left behind in the House of Hee-Chin. This law is most sacred. To fail is death. Remember the tombstone upon Foo-Lang's back!"

The Medicine-Man had disappeared; that half of his duty cancelled, there remained the other: "See that no dead or injured are left behind in the House of Hee-Chin!"

What unknown dangers might lie within that house, that garden? Action might unseat the misery that was beginning to envelop him.

His feet made toward that street where the battle had been waged. He walked. He ran. Voices pursued him, rearing a wall that followed close upon his heels, shutting off all possibility of turning back.

"No shameful act nor cowardly deed may soil him who drinks from this bowl!" The voice of Ho-We seemed to whisper in the wind.

Upon the curtain of the darkness into which he plunged he beheld beckoning him as from a dream the venerable figure of the Chief waving his immense sleeves in a rhythm that had no end:

"Above all else the dead are holy and must be restored to our own soil else they will range forever the regions of the living and appear wherever we may set our eyes."

"The dead are sacred!" Ah, this he knew! Had not his childhood been spent in worshiping the dead?

Now he was close upon the wall where he had seen the bandit-archer take his stand, sending to the door of Mee-Chin the message winged with an arrow.

Beyond that wall, who knew what danger waited? What dead? What living?

He drew back, leaned against a tree. He listened. There was no sound but the papery music of a few dry leaves turning upon boughs. Again loneliness, acute as body-pain, spread through him. Above the wall, branches bent secretly, faintly, in the rising wind. Beyond them a pavement of silver hung upon the air. It was the roof of the House of Hee-Chin, Lord of Bei-Chio. Deliberately, with iron feet, he walked through the open gate and so into the garden. The ground was trampled, scarred, torn by combat. But no face blue with moonlight turned toward him. He searched, groping with his hands where his eyes might not penetrate. Then he stood erect, remembering. As the military police had passed him in the Square, he had wondered that upon some horses rode two men. The police had been here in this garden before him, had combed its shadows,

and in that furious cavalcade that had streamed away under the moon, the living had ridden with the dead.

He ran toward the house. Stopped short, glanced at the arrow piercing the door, saw the paper gone. Entered.

Within was darkness. He lit the fire-rope he carried at his belt. In the small but steady glow it shed he saw confusion. He picked his way over heavy rice-bags and sought a door facing him. He pushed it open. The space felt large; a hall rather than a room. With the fire-rope held above his head he made the journey of its wide dimension. Upon the floor lay bowls shattered, chairs broken, glass strewn. Circling that place he moved gradually toward its center. There a huge table spread itself for feasting, as if awaiting the company of many men.

One man remained. He was dressed in the livery of the Household of Hee-Chin. His head was sunken in the miniature garden that raised its trees and towers upon the board.

Takawo lifted that man gently. The head fell back into the poisonous green grass of the table decoration. A rivulet of red curled about the neck.

Takawo turned, made quick steps away, swung the fire-rope in a wide circle to encompass the room, discovered above him, leaning from a balcony, a face observing him.

Takawo found the stair leading to that balcony, scaled it, sped toward the man, shook him. The man shook, too, and with a soft shiver of derision. Takawo touched the face and turned it toward his own. The lips were gathered back as if by strings, the teeth gleamed, the eyes were jelled within the head.

The live man cursed and drew in his breath.

He whirled about, searched the shadows for the sound, the smell, the sight of a living creature.

At the far end of the balcony a light glimmered faintly. He trod toward it as if fearing it might wither into darkness if he made the smallest sound. The light remained. It was shining from beneath a door that was open slightly. He pushed the door; it yielded underneath his hand.

It was a woman's room: golden and red and blue. Upon the floor there was a bed that was empty and convulsed: the embroidered coverlets flung here, flung there, as if strewn by a high wind.

In the midst of this, a pale yellow lamp burned serene. Takawo went toward it; his blood greeting it as if it were a living thing. He touched it and felt its warmth; he put his hands against the direct rays of its illumination. His hands showed red. He laughed.

He was alive! And here was warmth! His own blood a friend! A "Yes" in this house of "No." He flung himself down upon the bed, rolled into the silken covers, rolled clear of them. Put his face close to the embroidered pillow, sniffed, lay still. A woman's perfume, still lingering warm upon them, sent dark electricity tingling through his nerves. He lay there still, tasting the delicious tremors of his flesh when gradually the room began to freeze; then all at once he rose, aware through some new-added sense that he was not alone. Feverishly he began to touch every detail of the room: the lacquer boxes open, the silks, the gleaming ivory and the jade.

He came at last to a table laden with woman's clothes; picked up the golden coat that was tossed upon them all, that swept down over one side, casting a shadow on the floor. He touched the texture of its cloth, noted the em-

broidered dragons climbing its shining panels; examined the stitchings of blue, of green, of scarlet. Saw the scarlet shine. Saw it applied in beads. Saw the beads grew larger toward the hem. Picked up the hem, looked closer, found the scarlet, blood.

He waited. Fear, like a weight, pushed down his head. He stooped. Under the table, crumpled as if to hide, lay a young man dressed in Mai-Sai vest, a peasant's cape thrown over him.

Takawo took the lamp and held it low. The man was dead.

"The dead are sacred . . . restore them to our own soil . . . else they will range forever the regions of the living and appear wherever we may set our eyes." Like a bitter wind the words whistled in Takawo's ears.

He placed the lamp upon the table. He sat the young man up, propped him against his knees. Takawo crouched, hoisted his comrade to his back, staggered, found his feet, and went from out that room. He stepped upon the balcony, moved forward. The sound of gentle feet came toward him. He stopped. The sound of steps was silenced. He swung his comrade from his back and reached for his long dagger.

From the shadows a lady glided.

Takawo's weapon fell.

Calmly the lady looked at him; then spoke:

"Do not take him away!"

"It is my duty to bring him back; he is my brother."

"Who are you?" She made a silken-soft step toward Takawo and raised her eyes.

"Who I am does not matter but this man is kin to me and it is my sworn duty to bring him to that place from whence he came."

"Fire?" Her voice curled with mystery.

"Water!" His heart beat fast as he made the Mai-Sai answer.

"Then, Brother, you have no time to lose! Presently the troops will return to search the house. Already they have searched the garden. Hasten and join your comrades. Come, I shall light this lamp at the far end of the balcony."

With steps privy to the place she went toward the stair and soon a soft light was diffused about her. She wore a moon-pale night-robe that shone upon her breasts and fell in gleaming panels to embroidered shoes; over this sheer cloth was thrown a coral-colored coat bossed with embroideries of green and blue. Her hair streamed in deep and shadowed rivers past the perfect oval of her face and reached the hem of her shimmering gown. From under the delicate ivory of her lids, her narrow eyes burned bronze.

Out of his bewilderment the young man spoke:

"I cannot leave this house without you, for in observing you I have lost all fear. You have courage to come alone into this place of shadows and of death, then surely I need not flee!"

"You have no time to lose." She clasped her hands before her breasts and raised her eyes to him.

"But I cannot understand why you are here."

Her answer was impatient: "I have told you. I came to fetch this man who lost his life for my sake. But since you are come, it is better you restore him to his Kin; and quickly!"

She took a few steps toward the stair as if she would hasten him away. Then she turned and rested her gaze upon him, a faint smile baring her little teeth:

"I came here to fulfill an oath; but you have released me. I am grateful."

Her voice was gentle but so calm Takawo was moved by the strange magic of her person. His limbs seemed weighted and his eyelids drooped. Any motion that would take him from her seemed impossible, absurd.

"It seems to me you are not unfriendly to Mai-Sai and if I leave you here perhaps some doom may fall upon you. Come with me! I am told the women of my village are not unhappy and with me you will be more safe than wandering in a house haunted by evil and by death!"

The lady turned away her face. After many moments she glanced at him, her eyes as steady as before:

"It is my duty to remain here even as it is your duty to return to camp carrying your comrade. If you wish me well, ask no further question. Perhaps at some future time and in circumstances less mysterious, we may meet again. But hasten!"

The last word was spoken with the sharpness of command. Muto took one step toward her but she faced him with unflickering eyes; rather she seemed to rest her gaze upon some object distant and obscure, and he was reminded strangely of the look of longing in Lee's face when she had told him of her home in the mountains of Shanshi. More unwillingly, therefore, he hoisted his comrade to his back, and he began the descent of the stair, his desire drawing him ever back to that girl who remained standing on the balcony.

When he had gained the room below he turned and looked at her.

"Is this farewell?" he said.

She did not answer him with lips but with her eyes.

"Who knows," he went on, warmed by the radiance of her glance, "on this night what doom may fall? At least and for a moment I see one who is living and is lovely! Is this farewell?"

"Farewell." So gently did the word steal forth it seemed her voice was winged as in a dream.

Then with a pang he saw a strand of hair was glued against her cheek and she had taken one small tress into her mouth, biting it between her teeth.

"Farewell!" He wrenched his eyes from her. That last pathetic little gesture with her hair had revealed to him how superbly she had worn her mask of calm, and once again he was reminded of Lee-Kwan-Tien and of her anxious heart hidden beneath a mask of gracious dignity.

He turned abruptly, not daring to obey the dictate of desire which bade him stay; with weighted step he took his way through the dining-room, the hall, the garden.

The wind had risen and the street was dressed in gloom of the moon. Houses were shut and lamps quenched. To Takawo it seemed doors and windows were shut against him and from drawn screens enemies watched his every step. He felt himself a giant as if that absurdly long shadow that walked before had become his very self.

Painfully, he directed his way toward the Square, the well. These, too, were inimical. Only a bucket holding a little water which he drank avidly gave him the sense that any fragment of existence was friendly to him.

He had swung his comrade from his back and was gazing about him, his thought concentrated on the gate that would lead him from the village when he heard a bell

ringing in the darkness of a nearby street and a monotonous voice intoned the chant:

"Woo-ton, Shyomein-ya! Woo-ton, Shyomein-ya!"

In other villages of China he had heard the cry of the noodle-vendor, but to-night this seemed insanely ludicrous. That any creature might start from these mysterious and sleeping houses and at this hour demand "Shyomein-ya" seemed a figment from a grotesque nightmare. He bared his teeth in a grin of shuddering amusement. He hoisted his brother to his shoulders and made off as quickly as he could in the direction of the bell. His steps were slow and made no sound and the vendor did not see him come. Takawo leaned his comrade against a wall, and went toward the cart lit by a swaying lantern. The vendor stopped the ringing of his bell.

"Woo-ton or shyomein?"

"No.... I thank you... nothing."

Suddenly Takawo was unable to bring forth what was in his mind.

The man made a few steps toward him. Some strangeness of voice or gesture had roused the vendor's curiosity. Suddenly the eyes of the man fastened themselves on the front of Muto's coat. It was stained with blood.

The peddler's mouth unhinged. He trembled, his knees collapsed, he took in with horrified, suspecting eyes, the sagging body propped against the wall.

Takawo understood and spoke:

"Do not be afraid. I have not killed the man I carry but I must get away from here. You must put him in your cart and take me to the gate at once."

The man shook his head.

Muto reached into his pouch: "Here are twenty coppers;

that is more money than your whole cart cost. Throw away your cans and make ready for my comrade."

A toothy grin divided the vendor's face.

"Only to the village-gate, the Gate of the East?"

"The nearest gate!"

At once the man began unpacking cans. In the square, deep box of the cart, Takawo placed his brother. The peddler rolled down the paper screen, snuffed out the lantern.

"You hold the clapper of the bell so we'll make no noise." The man handed Takawo the symbol of his trade.

The vendor placed himself in the shafts of the cart and paced his feet into a run. Takawo followed.

For a half-hour they padded on in darkness. Just without the gate, the peddler lifted the screen and began to unload the body.

Again the vendor had begun to tremble. He was wrapped in a miasma of fear; Muto longed to be rid of him.

"So you are afraid outside the gate? I am afraid within it. It is best we part."

The fellow nodded. Together the two men lifted up the dead. Without a word the man veered his cart about, placed himself within the shafts, and made off through the shadow of the gate into the blackness of the street beyond.

Takawo leaned against a wall and faced the dark plain before his eyes. After many minutes he began again to hoist his comrade to his back, but now the weight seemed immeasurable. How had he carried it from the house to the well? To start forward into this unknown region seemed the act of a madman. There was no escape. He knelt down, lifted the man level with himself, raised him slowly. Then stepped forward.

Across the moon flew clouds pursued by the wind and only from time to time was he able to distinguish the faint outline of hills, of forests, of plain. But hardly had these moved into his vision when darkness snatched them back and he walked a road as invisible as air.

When he had gone some small distance he looked round and in an interval of illumination from the moon, observed the gate through which he'd come. If this were the door where the bandits had penetrated the village, then it should be familiar to him. But now this gate seemed alien and new, and this dark plain uncharted.

The moon was clear again and poured upon this world the treacherous liquid of quicksilver. Into this he plunged, his feet plowing deep as in a mire. Behind him came the clapping of the wind. Or was it the footfalls of himself? Or of his brother?

The dead man walked behind. The dead. The man upon his back was dead. How did he know the man was dead? No, he himself had died. His brother was alive and rode him to his doom.

The moon was brilliant, gleaming as a skull. The plain swayed. Tall blades of grass tore sharply at his knees. Wet fingers of a wind slid across his skin. A profound sigh came from the distant hills. The sound moved toward him, grew, became a whistle. The winter had found him and marked him for her own.

He was cold. His feet were planted like trees within the earth. The sedge rattled, the plain undulated as if a million serpents swam toward him. Underground a scurrying and a hurrying of wind as if rodents ran before his every step.

The man upon his back was dead.

This Takawo knew, for in the deepening cold the man was stiffening. Was clutching him. Hugging him with arms of ice, with legs of steel.

Takawo must reach the Elm-Tree and a fire!

For these his need cried out. His feet stopped. He looked back. Along the earth lay an immense shadow. Takawo stumbled, fell, his body entangled with the dead. He lay prone, waiting. For what? He rose to his knees and lit his fire-rope. He put it close to his face, curled his fingers round its spark. For that small flame he knew a sudden passion. He grinned, feeling the flesh of his face as thick as clay.

He quenched the light and tried to hoist the body. The stiffening in the cold made this more difficult. He tried again, stumbled once more, lay still.

From the hills came the barking of wolves. He dragged himself to his feet, tried to get below his burden. He could not. The man had lost the dignity of a human body. It was a carcass to be dragged home. With numbed hands, Takawo caught at it, found a place to hold, lurched forward. The carcass started after him along the ground.

The skull of Takawo had become as paper. The cold penetrated. Fatigue oozed its poison. He plodded on, his senses gone.

"Fire—tree—fire—tree—fire!"

His blood beat the rhythm. It was all left him.

The ground rose. The sedge was thinner. Before him a bare hillock; Takawo's heart leaped. This was solace from monotony. He bent his neck as if to climb a mountain; he gained the top, the bundle dragging after him. He sat down. The thing creaked and then was silent. Takawo rested upon its shoulder and he slept.

The bitter wind of morning wakened him. He unloosed his eyelids, raised his head, saw the plain gray and endless round about.

He sat up slowly; the blood in his veins trickled like an ice-bound stream. The warmth of his awakening brain seeped down his shoulders, back, arms, to his hands. But one hand remained alien. Takawo found himself staring at the ten fingers intertwined, saw the symmetry of bones, and their articulation. For a moment this handclasp seemed marvelous, then horrible, prophetic. He jerked his hand away, for his own had been locked in the hand of the dead, and to his pain-driven mind it seemed this clasp was symbol he, too, had joined the company of those who are exiled forever from the living earth.

Behind him voices spun in the air, flew to his ear, settled there, sent arrows of cheer to his heart.

"Is not that a comrade on the knoll?"

"The light is so dim I cannot tell."

"Were a cruel thing to give the boy that duty of the dead.... The Medicine-Man was caught and surely the lad was close at hand. Perhaps he, too, beholds the dawn from the top of a pole, and bodiless."

"But come closer, for it may indeed be our Brother from Nowhere who sits beyond!"

Tramp of men's feet: Takawo turned his head, saw coming through the mist of morning two figures of men, towering on the barren plain. He tried to get to his feet, to wave a hand. His throat alone responded, but with a cry so muffled his heart cringed in fear at the stricken creature that made moan through his own lips. He lay still, waiting.

When he lifted his head, a gray wave rose above him.

Wave or man, he did not know. He was set in a high place. He rode through a cold wind, rode for hours, wakened, saw the faces of two men close beside him in the quickening day, heard voices, did not heed their words, could not. Heard the clap of hoofs upon a street of stone, saw before him a door painted with black lettering, heard the murmur of women's voices, sunk softly down and slept.

And slept while Time swirled past him. Days or nights, there was no change; only a deeper darkness, a thinner twilight. At last he wakened, hearing the sound of men moving overhead. He started. Had he been buried? But there was sunlight, a river of radiance flowing from skylight-opening to a floor. He rose, found himself dressed. A door met his eyes, he opened it, and walked out upon a sun-bright street.

A crowd was gathered whose eyes were fixed upon the roof of that house from which Muto had emerged. There against the sky stood many men, their heads and shoulders gilded by the sun. They lifted great winnowing baskets in their hands, and made the rhythmic swinging motions of the winnowers of grain. But Takawo saw no chaff fly, nor grain fall.

He turned to a boy standing by:

"Why do these men face the North and make as if to winnow grain and yet have no grain to winnow?"

"They are calling the spirit of 'Pine-and-Wind' to return from the North, the dwelling-place of all the dead."

Even as the boy spoke he moved away. Quickly Takawo added:

"Do not be afraid! I am no demon come to harm you."

"But you have put hands upon the dead. You brought him home; you are unclean!"

The boy shot another glance of horror at Takawo and slipped away as a fish dives into the dark waters of the bottom stream.

Takawo darted his eyes about him and saw that faces were turning toward him and eyes were freighted with fear. Softly he stole away and reëntered the house from which he had come.

He found his bed, lay down upon it and for hours was a-swing between dreams and recollection. He did not waken until Feng stood before him, saying:

"Best not appear again upon the street until the period of purification is past. Here in the house of the widow of 'Pine-and-Wind' you will remain five days, then once more you will be fit to go out among men. Only to-morrow can you be seen by us, for you must appear in the Procession of the Dead. Then you must return again to this house to live out the time of your uncleanliness."

Takawo looked with accepting eyes and smiled faintly:

"Was it you who found me and brought me home? And is this, home?"

"Hou-Mei and I found you near the Elm. You have fulfilled your Mai-Sai oath with fortitude. In time honor will come to you. But for the present, sleep. You will need your strength to win the pleasures of your reward. For the present this is your home; if you wish, it can be so longer."

Feng looked at him gently and left the room.

Night came and through confused dreams Takawo heard the voices of mourners telling the life of the departed, he heard the pad of feet upon corn-cob floors, and with the dawn these sounds grew so the morning was filled with

rhythmic sobbing of the weepers, the prayers of men. Upon these sounds as upon a tower, came the beat of drums.

The new day was barren of sun and through the skylight a fine rain fell. It touched the floor softly and Takawo lay with half-closed eyes watching the stitching of the drops.

Now the words of a prayer came from over the screen that shut the young man from the comrade he had carried home.

A man's deep voice sang:

"'Pine-and-Wind' was a good man,
Though much he did in his life
We shall not tell about in song:
His evil-demon traveled northward
And his soul took flight toward the South;
Soon he will cross the Last River,
Where the Cloudy Ship awaits him,
It will bear him to the Shore of Heaven,
And there a child once more
He will build forever
Houses of clay and stone."

Takawo raised himself on his elbow and stared, for a company of white horses stood within the open doorway and fixed him with their steady eyes. Seeking the contour of their form, his glance slipped down from these proud heads; but no bodies filled anticipation. The heads were set upon long poles held by a dozen boys in white. Now came the sound of many men and of a great wooden weight dragged along the floor. The horses turned their heads, the

poles veered, the boys disappeared into that room where drum and weepers kept up their din of grief.

Into the space left by this vision came stalwart men in white bringing with brown hands a square-shaped coffin. This, too, went its way into the room of death. Takawo rose from his bed and followed those who had gone before.

The room was thick with mourners in robes of white, the color of the dead. "Pine-and-Wind" lay upon his corn-cob bed, his garment turned upon him as they turn the clothes of those who have no need for them: the hem upon the neck, the collar at the feet. Men undid the ropes about the coffin, picked up the body of their brother, and set it crouched within: cold knees pressing against unbreathing breast. One by one men and women came, stooped, placing within that Last-Journey House, gifts of love and remembrance: chestnuts dried in sun and little cakes, flower-formed; and wine in jugs that had been shaped by broad women-hands.

Suddenly prayerful lips were stilled and under a screen of silence, Chief Ken-Jin entered, trailing white garments from his broad and ancient shoulders. To the coffin he made steps, stood before it, holding high above the head of him who sat within a packet tied with white. The Chief's lips murmured:

"This cord that bound you
To your mother
Now binds you to the North
Where feathered spirits dwell!
There you will know

The gentle darkness
And the warm peace
Of the maternal womb."

The Chief turned, went from the room, four men bore upon their shoulders that Pagoda of Peace, carried it out upon the street, the mourners streaming after them. Before the house a litter waited, the casket placed therein, the Chief paced forward, all the procession following him.

Takawo walked behind, and a little to one side the others.

They came to that Square where the bandit-men had bidden farewell before the sortie to Bei-Chio. Now two mourners' mats were laid upon the ground and straightly. Between them at the further end a canopy and chair; at the nearer, two bowls, one flaming fire, the other smoking with the pungent mist of incense.

The procession divided, making two great tongues of white upon the earth; the women took their places on the western mat; the men upon the east.

The Pagoda of the Dead stopped before the bowls and the bodiless horses leaned against its sides.

While the procession had moved to the mats, Chief Ken-Jin had disappeared; but now when men and women sat with bowed heads, steps sounded, garments rustled, and the Chief walked forward between two sages. Ken-Jin wore a scarlet dress of silk and his venerable head was outlined against a scarlet triangle of ruff that started from

his shoulders like the wings of a fleeing bird. Across his chest passed a gold and scarlet band which lost itself in shadows of long sleeves. The old men pacing with him were robed in black with scarves of white.

The Chief moved slowly, the magnet of five hundred eyes. When he stood before the burning bowl, he raised one hand wherein he held a hammer large and carven out of wood.

Ken-Jin's voice stole upon the air, while came from lips of mourners, the faint buzz of prayers. The Chief's words mounted the ladder of his grief, of grief of all his clan. It rose, growing momently more great. It took wings of fury at Fate which had slain their men. "Pine-and-Wind" was become a symbol of their common loss.

This grief swung upon the air, gathering power from the earth, from the hearts of those who live upon the earth. It flung itself at heaven. It screamed aloud, blindly, a wounded eagle of sound, cracking the blue in fury.

The arm of the Chief swung low, swung high. It was the minor to his major song of sorrow. At last with that eagle cry of pain, his arm shot up, the hammer flew from his hand, it crashed against the Pagoda of the Dead; it fell to earth.

When the bell-beats of its waves had ceased, Chief Ken-Jin walked with slow steps to that canopy at the far end of the mourners' mats. Upon the chair he took his place and bowed his head, avoiding the eyes of men, of women who had given power to his arm and voice.

Breaths came again, backs straightened, the air brightened. The widow of "Pine-and-Wind" rose. She went, pacing flat feet, toward Death's Pagoda. She took a pinch

of incense and flung it in the burning bowl, and with her thick lips prayed.

She returned to the mat, bowed her head again. Another and yet another woman rose and made her prayer. For them Takawo had weary eyes; did not raise his head to look at them. Saw without seeking, the procession of peasant-feet, fat as the bamboo-sprout in spring; of bound-feet, thin and fragile as the cup of porcelain. Then came at last two smooth golden-colored feet, beautifully boned, rising with elegant economy to the richness of the legs revealed by white trousers snug upon them.

Slowly Takawo raised his head, lingered pleasurably over that climbing scrutiny of his eyes; for some moments denied himself the full contour of her body that he might the more carefully observe its gracious architecture; saw the hips smooth, elastic, moving with subtle firmness; touched with his glance the swelling of her breasts; embraced with his eyes the proud smooth column of her neck, cupped with his adoration, a face sweet and recognizable. Nadja walked before him!

She walked in the light of his eyes, unknowing; went to the incense bowl, pinched with her ivory fingers, those tiny grains; and with a rounded gesture flung them in the flames of the bowl. With her small red lips, sensitive as a serpent, murmured prayers, turned, paced back, the bronze eyes screened by creamy lids, the sunlight warm in the brown coils of her hair.

She sat down, glanced about as the deer in the forest before it lies down to sleep, and caught the glance of Takawo. Their eyes embraced. A hurricane of blood suffused her cheeks. Her lips paled. She bent her head. A breeze beating upon her secret heart sent her breasts lift-

ing. Takawo felt the caged blood cry in his own veins; lowered his eyes, sat still as if encased in ice.

The bodiless horses at the Pagoda had begun to circle the Carriage of the Dead. The mourners rose and with reverent step streamed after it, a river of white following the coffin away.

The young man sat alone, saw the men, the women pass into a distant street, saw Nadja rise, but still he sat and stared upon the ground. He rose at last and returned to that house where he had lain for days; dreaming, waking, feverish.

The house was silent so one might hear the creaking of a board. Takawo lay down upon his corn-cob bed and beheld the square of sky that shone through the open roof. The morning of fine rain had turned to a noon of clarity and cold. He lay there long, tasting the silence with the delicate palate of his weariness.

Slowly he slid down the slopes of sleep and did not waken till the treachery of the moon made unreal the room he lay within.

Then came before him, walking, a fat and flat-faced phantom. With vague and irritated wonder he gazed at the apparition. Slowly he raised himself upon his elbow and sat up.

The phantom spoke: "Don't you know me? I'm widow to 'Pine-and-Wind.' Best I light a lamp?"

Takawo sagged into his bed. He recalled too clearly the morning hour when this woman had made her way to the burning bowl and had said her prayer. He preferred to speak without beholding her face more clearly.

"Moonlight is the lantern of the soul. Better remain in darkness."

"Without you here, friends would have come with light and food." Reproach made sharp her voice.

"Feng told me I must remain here five days. It is the Mai-Sai law."

"Five days!" She chuckled bitterly and left the room. He heard her rumbling among clay pots in that distant place where she prepared her food. As she worked he heard the slow words of a chant:

> "They're right, they're right
> Those who say
> The last husband is the best . . ."

He rose suddenly, aware of some suggestion involving him. Through the room dappled with silver he found the door and went to her, sat down in the dim light of a lamp, watched her silently for many minutes, then raised his voice:

"Your husband must have been a strong and brave man to receive such devotion from you. Be certain I shall respect your grief and trouble you in no way."

She looked at him with small eyes that gleamed from beneath pouched lids, and in silence continued to prepare a tray of tea and rice. These finished she carried them into the room where her husband had lain dead.

Takawo waited, heard a gong strike thrice, heard the whispered words of a prayer. The widow of "Pine-and-Wind" returned, set the tray down before Takawo.

"He won't eat; I give it to you."

"I thank you," the young man smiled, and pushed the

tray away. The woman had sat down opposite him, the tray between their knees.

"You must not grieve too much," Takawo's voice was weary. He wished it might be a screen shutting from his eyes this unlovely creature who had come to haunt his still bewildered brain.

"You must not grieve too much," he repeated, because the words fell easily from his lips. "Though your husband is gone he still remains behind."

The small eyes of the woman glistened and her teeth bared in a grin. She waved one hand in denial, put the other on her belly:

"No, nothing remains here. I crossed the moon safely."

"No, you do not understand. I mean not a child but his spirit in your heart."

She waved her hand again:

"No, no ghost here! Nothing left behind!"

He searched her fat and literal eyes and in nauseated fascination gazed at the flat unillumined face, the oily neck, the drooping breasts visible at the opening of her dress.

Suddenly this woman leaned forward, her voice sliding down the scale to a muffled intimate note:

"Don't stare at me so long; I don't look into the well for many days."

"I am not thinking of beauty." He turned his eyes away, let them fall to her broad and puffy hands.

"You see beautiful women on journeys?"

He glanced up. A sly insinuation curled her words. She placed her right hand on her left shoulder and her chin

was hidden in the folds of her sleeve. The small eyes darted blunted daggers of desire.

"You see many beautiful women on your journeys?" she repeated.

Takawo put his lips together carefully, his voice struck out:

"Yes, many."

She did not wince, but let her voice slip still further down the scale of intimacy.

"Men say women near the sea have skins like dead gold-fish. Is that true?"

"It is more like silk."

The widow of "Pine-and-Wind" tore her dress down from the neck, exposing a spotted pudgy shoulder.

"Feel this! See if Mai-Sai women have not also skin like silk!"

Takawo rose suddenly and walked away; at the door he turned to look at her. Again she had taken that pose of hand on shoulder, chin hidden in her sleeve, head tilted to one side.

He swung about once more and faced the darkness of his own room, walked into it, fell upon his bed, dug the mattress with his fingers, his body stiff with hatred and disgust.

Suddenly he sprang up, went to the house-door, tore it open. The wind of the mountains blew upon him. He drank the clean air deeply, his heart dancing with this taste of freedom. He was about to step into the street, had put his foot upon the stone of the threshold, when a man ran toward him with a threatening cry.

"Unclean, unclean! Live out the time of your uncleanliness."

He pushed Takawo back into the shadows of the house and locked the door.

Takawo watched a fat and feeble fly about his room. Sometimes it found the skylight and started to go out but always it returned as if some unseen wall kept it imprisoned. He watched the tiny creature, seeing in it a symbol of himself.

The widow of "Pine-and-Wind" came to him, offered him food, gave him her pipe, picked up his hands and squeezed the fingers with a dreadful zeal.

At such time Takawo spoke:

"At this time of mourning, the affection of the spring is most unholy."

To this rebuff the woman paid no heed, but murmured stubbornly:

"You bring home my dead husband, you win his house, his mate. This is our law."

To her Takawo gave no answer but a glance of steel.

Upon the morning of the fifth day the door of the house was torn open. A fresh breeze entered, and a pure flood of sunlight. Takawo leaped from his bed, went toward that invitation as to a heaven of freedom. A man whose face he did not know stood beckoning him.

Takawo stepped forward as if with feet winged, breathed hungrily that fresh delicious odor of the early day, addressed the man:

"Is the time of my imprisonment at end?"

The man nodded and walked away, leaving no word behind.

People swarmed the streets. A drum's beat throbbed within the air. A titan-pillow walked upon a hundred legs. Two giant serpents of green and scarlet, gold and silver, gulped the air with maws of red. Beneath their bellies ran a hundred human feet. Here horses of basketry dashed into house-doors, chased children, teased women. The Clan of Mai-Sai erupted everywhere. Banners spanked the wind; men cried to their women from the house-doors, women screamed at children. This din, this fever and this festival heaved slowly, like a log-choked river toward the Village-Square.

Takawo ran down the street in its direction and saw two towers stride the sky, heard more clear the beat of drums.

The sun was silvery and poured a pure and sparkling light into that Place of Celebration, decked in the Mai-Sai orange and the red. Streamers, serpent-like, crawled through the enclosing fence, and posts were plumed with them.

In the center, a tent of red and yellow. Under its streaked roof, a pile of sand, smooth and invitational, spread between great bags of sand. Hanging from the four posts, props to the roof, baskets of bamboo and bags of salt.

Along the fence were stalls awaiting the magician and the play of puppets, the vendor of noodles and of meat.

Before Takawo's eyes, straight toward the end of that great space, thick now with churning men, women, chil-

dren, a platform high, and bright with banners. Upon it a chair of ebony inlaid with pearl.

Within that chair the Chief now sat; at his feet a rug bearing the emblem: HAPPINESS. Over his head a drapery flying the inscription: COURAGE!

In red coat with sash of gold, the Chief rose and meeting his people with his eyes, spoke thus:

"Thanks to our Ancestors, our Great Teachers, and to that Brother Who Comes from Nowhere, we have brought back to our own soil one brave comrade, 'Pine-and-Wind.' Let the man who brought him home step close."

In that crowd ranged with custom and design about the platform, Takawo was scarcely visible. The Chief's eyes were keen. He searched him out, fixed him with his gaze, went on:

"You stand not in the order that is fitting. Stand with the young men, with those who on this day will choose a mate. Come here!"

Takawo moved forward as slowly as he dared. When he stood below the platform, the Chief bent his eyes upon him and then turned to search the ranks of women standing near.

"Widow of 'Pine-and-Wind,' approach!"

That plump persistent lady grinned her way through rows of women till she stood shoulder to shoulder with Takawo.

"Tao-Shang, have you given our Brother from Nowhere the hospitality befitting his courage and his service to your mate?"

The widow raised one hand toward her shoulder and Takawo saw, as in a panic, she would pose again that dreadful gesture of the coy. He made haste to speak:

"This gracious and kind lady took such excellent care of me, I was overwhelmed by her attention."

The young man bowed his head, hiding the smile upon his lips. The woman stole a sidelong glance at him; then circled the women with a look of pride.

The Chief went on: "We shall pray for 'Pine-and-Wind'; then celebrate, be happy. But no shedding of blood!"

Heads bowed, a cloud of prayer rose from many mouths. Now broad faces were raised to face the sun; shining hair of women caught the purple day; teeth flashed; and shoulders stirred under ancient garments richly decked for festival.

Then followed games: pigs chased across the open space, heading into gusts of laughter that met them on all sides. Stairs of rice-bags to be scaled. He who gains the crest may win a hundred days of ease from hunger. Women dance in serpentines; heads swaying, broad hips veering, slant eyes burning. Puppets quack strange voices and saw the air in mimicry. Magicians tell the days that are to come and open caskets of the future. Children shout, flaunt their toys, stare at the dragon-flags that ride the blue.

Slowly day gathers up its brightness and with the ebbing hours leaves the Square dizzy in drunkenness, reeking with smell of flesh, of incense, of sweat, of oily perfume of the women.

Then steals at last the twilight. The stars stand clear. The moon gleams silvery.

A vendor weaves his scarlet dress through the crowd and he carries in his hand a jar in which are papers frilled, some blue, some red.

"Warriors of the West, the East, come draw, come draw!"

Men cluster to his side and draw their destiny with papers.

Suddenly a lantern greater than all others sails the evening-sky. It bears the emblem: "God of Light!"

It climbs till it flies higher than the rest. It joins the company of the nearer stars and swings in a fitful wind.

Below it spreads the battling-tent of scarlet and of yellow.

The drummers in the towers whir their drums. The crowd flows toward the tent; the women take their places at the North, the South. The men divide into two companies; those who have drawn papers of blue take their stand upon the East; the Reds crowd close upon the western side. The open tent is a square fringed with men taut for battle; with women, an urgent ache within their blood. Who knows who will win and choose them? What lover will bed them for a month? For longer? What father to what child?

The Referee in robe of war leaps to the center of the stage. His legs seemed winged, for his trousers are immense. Upon the left hip jangles a sword with tragic-comic glitter and dance. Between his hands a huge fan. This he turns to East, to West. Through a tunnel-mouth cries out:

"Elimination is begun!"

He struts toward the eastern post; dives an arm into a bag of salt; tosses the grains toward the East, the West; calls out again:

"Our ancestors and gods protect you. Be honest, brave!"

Struts to the North, cries to the ranks of women:

"You who cross the moon, sit low. Would you infect your heroes with uncleanliness?"

Struts to the South, crying the same cry.

No woman stirs. They have been forewarned. No menstrual woman has come near.

The Announcer in trousers of blue leaps to the ring, puts an immense fan to his lip and intones a song as of the wind:

"Ah, oh, oo; ah, oh, oooo! Inhabitants of East, of West, of North, of South, here comes a Warrior from the Dawn! His name . . . ah, I have forgotten the name!"

On drunken feet he lurches to the East, peers into the ranks of men, whispers under his fan. A man stands up, naked save for a loin cloth of blue.

"My name is Rapid Stream."

"To be sure! Kyoo-Ryoo!" The Announcer-Clown waves his fan at the crowd, "Rapid Stream is here to battle with . . . but WHAT is his name?"

With feet entangled he veers to the West, whispers under his fan. A man stands up, naked save for a loin cloth of red.

"To be sure! Tou-kakoo!" the fan flutters in the air. "Fighting Eagle will do battle with Rapid Stream."

The two men stand, leap into the ring. The Warrior in Blue takes salt, puts it on his lips, throws grains toward the East, the West. The Warrior of the West takes salt, puts it on his lips, tosses grains toward the West, the East. From a bowl blessed by Chief Ken-Jin they suck water and spurt it in great streams upon their legs. They crouch, their shoulders glisten and gleam in the light of swinging lanterns. They crouch lower, legs at sharp angles to their straining backs.

Between them the fan of the Referee descends. The wrestlers wheel their shoulders. Breath is stilled upon the lips of all. Silence is concave with eagerness.

The fan of the Referee jerks into the air. The warriors leap. Too soon! The fan is down again. The Referee grins his grin of torture. So with this leaping fan, signal for the battle, does he tease the heart and set the blood to bursting in the veins.

Three times that fan leaps, three times the wrestlers spring. To no avail. At last the fan leaps high, the men embrace in fury. He loses who touches the floor with other than his feet.

The West is thrown, skids the sand with his buttocks, rolls back upon his gleaming shoulders, his blue-black hair crushed into the sand. His conqueror prances over him, teeth gleaming, eyes flashing. A shout. If Strength of the Sun will stay with him he may win the woman of his choice. He darts a glance toward the North. A girl strains forward, her elbows resting on the sand-bag that makes the frontier of the fighting-floor. Suddenly her hand flies to her hair; she lets fly a comb. It falls at the feet of "Rapid Stream."

He strides three times around that fallen foe. He beats his chest, grins at the girl. He leers his pride into the faces of the East, the West. All men his enemy! All women fellows for his bed!

The Referee shears him of his pride; pushes him back into the Ranks of Blue. Elimination will go on for hours. Who knows what strength some warrior may unleash?

Another Warrior of the East; another Wrestler from the West leap to the fighting-floor, clutch, win, or lose. So on

and on: Blue battles Red of matching number and so the combats have their order and proud men lose their place to men as proud as they. Women know the ebb and flow of fear, following with burning eyes the men of their desire, cringing when men whom they detest throw those they love or loved.

So thirty pairs of men have fought and Number Thirty-One is called. From the West lumbers a giant-man, or so he seems in the flicker of the lantern-light. His body rolls; his great brown head is divided by the white line of a grin. He wheels his shoulders as he walks; turns the sinewy legs in the great sockets of the hips. The women clap; the men sting him with their silence.

He stands grinning; lets fall his heavy stare into the West. No combatant steps forth.

The Referee gambols at the giant's side.

"What! No challenger? No Thirty-One? Fled like a rabbit to his hole?"

Near Takawo, Feng stands. He touches his friend upon the shoulder.

"Are you afraid? Better slip away."

Takawo jerks attention to his friend.

"What has this man to do with me?"

"Did you not draw a paper?"

"Yes."

"Read the number written there."

Takawo looks at the frilled paper in his hand. On it, painted in black brush-strokes, "Thirty-One."

He glances at the giant looming overhead. Darts his eyes at Feng.

"I am not prepared; look at these clothes I wear. Shall I try swimming with a stone?"

"Take this." Feng unrips the vest from off Takawo, draws from his own loins the cloth of blue, winds it about the young man's body, pulls it tight, so tight the breath goes out of Takawo in a gasp.

"Tot-Tsu! Priest-under-the-Water! It's too tight!"

"I'd pull it tighter if you'd waken. I've watched you long. You walk as in a dream. Come, bring no shame upon the brother of your blood!"

Takawo glances up, feels the sting. Loosens the loin-cloth a little, steps forward, feet lifted high, his chest a bow. Sees himself playing a part—the little man to fight the giant. Smiles at the fate chosen for him. What skill is hidden in that bulking body of his enemy?

Takawo remembers combats with his teacher in the garden of his castle-home; is not afraid, for he has fought that Master of Jiu-jitsu and has won. Surely this brute-man with the face of a child—nothing to fear—and yet?

Young Muto leaps into the ring. The man might put him underneath his arm: so small Takawo, so tall that Warrior of the West. Laughter rips from throats of men and women. So ridiculous this battle: a dragon and a rabbit!

The Announcer hops between them.

"Mountain-Peak himself is challenging . . . but WHAT is YOUR name?"

"The Man from Nowhere!"

"Mountain-Peak will do battle with the Man-from-Nowhere!"

Roars of laughter etched with scorn.

The great man tosses salt to the West, the East. Takawo stands still, observing him.

"What! Will you not ask the gods to aid you?" The

Announcer squints his eyes in wonder at Takawo. The young man does not answer, watches his opponent, learning the manner of his movements, the secret ways of his gesture. The great man spurts water on his tombstone-thighs.

"What! You will not ask the gods to bless your body?"

"Your gods are not my gods and would not hear."

The West glares. This "foreign demon" must be thrown. Righteousness shoots flame into his blood. He crouches now, his legs seem pillars, his head a cannon-ball set on a neck of iron.

Takawo crouches, too, but loose-limbed, loose-armed; almost the dream-look in his eyes.

"Aren't you ready?" The Announcer prods him with his fan.

Takawo nods.

The fan descends; lifts high. No teasing play this time. This Man-from-Nowhere has tossed scorn to the gods. Let him suffer doom at once. The fan leaps; the giant lunges, his body aching for the splintery crash of that small body under his.

But Takawo turns upon his feet as upon a smooth revolving wheel. The Giant sprawls, chest down before the Man-from-Nowhere.

Silence gathers up her tail and slinks across the ring. The Announcer stands, mouth open, fan fallen on the ground. Hisses dart up into the air, but fall again, and then come slow and scattered cheers. But voices mingle crying "False! A trick! 'Mountain-Peak' cannot be vanquished by a flea!"

Elimination follows. This Man-from-Nowhere must

prove no devil lurked within when he threw down his foe. He must meet in combat those men who have won their fights. The numbers simmer down and down. The Man-from-Nowhere makes a mystery each time; what he does the spectators cannot see nor know. His is a skill learned in his native land; learned in an ancient philosophy, a body-wisdom wedded to a wisdom of the mind.

The elimination ends, Takawo still triumphant. Now the sour cheers have turned to steely silence. Strength of their blood, their bone, to be denied thus by a boy from a demon-land. He would not toss salt invoking the protection of the Mai-Sai gods; would give his body no drink of holy water. Secretly the women gleam and glisten in their lust of him who can throw down the mightiest of men. Turn that skill of combat to skill of love!

One girl shines in her pride; her golden lovely face keen with desire for his victory to the very last.

Takawo stands alone; quickness of wit, ancient art, making him victor over brutal strength.

From the shadows the Referee and the Announcer pull forward a tree-trunk sawed off to the height of a man's waist. They drag forward a wide board of wood. They command Takawo to lie down upon his back. Unwilling, bewildered, he obeys. They place the board upon his middle-body, then put the tree-trunk there. A sick nausea, a stagnant suffocation takes the place of breathing lung and beating heart. Muto waves his hands in a plea to be let off.

They raise the tree, the board. Men growl their anger. "Mountain-Peak" looms on the stage again. Takawo slips back into the rank of the East, finds Feng, whispers:

"If this be combat for strength alone, surely he is victor.

Let him have his glory. I am more content to watch than play the rôle of hero. Of that I've had enough."

Meanwhile "Mountain-Peak" endures the test of the trunk and board. Emerges grinning, stands upon his feet, glares into the Ranks of the East, seeking for Takawo.

"That Man-from-Nowhere, where is he? He failed in the Test of the Holy Tree. He must fight again or does he yield me victory without another trial? Where is that midge, that mud-turtle, and that coward?"

Takawo stands rigid and in shadow. He shuts his eyes in body-loathing of this man.

In that moment a soft hand touches his bare arm. He turns and finds a woman near. Her head is cowled. In the darkness he knows no feature of her face; but her voice is gentle, lovely.

"Come, take this and fight. This will give you strength beyond the strength of men."

Into his hand she puts a little packet wrapped within a kerchief. He unwinds the cloth and finds in his palm a few large seeds. He bends close, wishing he may see that face, caressing the ardent hope this mysterious girl may be the same he saw in the Procession of the Water-Carriers, on the Day of Funeral; and on that bright wind-driven morning when her eyes looked at him from the surface of the Holy Spring.

"Eat!" her gentle voice commands.

He takes the grains into his mouth. They sting. He turns to speak to her again, but she glides away and is lost in the deep well of night that yawns about the Battling-Square.

He winds the little cloth about his wrist, ties it, strides forward, separates the men as a swimmer cleaves the

waves. He stands upon the platform, tosses a smile into the teeth of the enemy. Nods his readiness to fight. Remembers the law of Mai-Sai: he who is hero of the games has first choice of women!

The Referee's fan leaps and falls. "Mountain-Peak" trembles from the roots of his body to the boughs of his great hair. The fan at last is down! The giant lunges, his arms encircling the air lest that Agile Eel escape. But Takawo has changed his plan. Instead of wheeling, crouched, to let the Giant fall, he springs high like a jet of water suddenly released. Then begins the dance of jiu-jitsu, the cunning footwork a marvel and a wonder to those unskilled in that science of Nippon. The Giant follows: fists swung low, head sunken on the chest, eyes starting on their stems, feet lumbering as best they may after the wizard-weaving of Takawo. But the Giant's arms are long. Suddenly they dart forward, envelop his opponent in a belt of stone; raise him high above his head. Growl of rage comes from the loose-slung lips.

Wind of despair turns Takawo's spine to bric-à-brac. A low muffled cry of women; a low ecstatic sigh from men.

A girl's arm's thrown up; a scream rips the air. Takawo knows that voice flung on darkness. Knows and turns to fiend. His legs have pedaled the air, but now they close, a vice of fury on the bull-like neck. Takawo's feet press in and in; seek cunningly the neck-cords leading to the brain; rivet these with steel. Rivet and hold—long.

The huge man sags. His brain withers. A moan bubbles from his slobber lips. He rocks softly to his knees. Takawo lands on his feet as a dancer may. Embraces that witless hulk with jiu-jitsu skill. Raises him; stoops under that

fallen-tree of man; lifts him aloft; over his shoulder lets him slide to the sand. The titan sprawls; does not rise again, for those nerves pressed on the neck stem the river of the will. He lies in vanquished stupor. A frenzy of applause rains in the air. A hail-storm of women's trifles, pledges of their love, fall at Takawo's feet. He does not glance in their direction but reaches for the salt from the basket at the post, scatters it on his fallen foe, stamps to right, to left, slips from the ring, is lost in ranks of men.

They reach out arms to hold him. He eludes them all, plunges into the well of darkness beyond the compass of the many lights. He hears following him the cry of "hero." He smiles his old-young smile; lingers, listening. Then goes on. Of Fate he is suspicious when it bows down to him.

But half an hour later a thought puts a wall before his steps. He lights a fire-rope, takes out the kerchief given by the girl, sees in the faint gleam a name embroidered on the scarf: that name is "Nadja"! He wheels about. Applause is fallen, scale on scale, to silence; and now upon the shining darkness steals another sound, the music of the koo-kyu. Quickly he makes his way back to the Place of Festival and sees the platform illumined at its further end; the Chief seated in his Chair of Ebony and Pearl, old men ranged close by, a dozen girls dancing the dance of Kyo-chyo-boo.

Below the stage, cross-legged upon the ground, men sit; their eyes upon the dancing girls. Takawo walks in among his brothers, sees the shoulders of "Mountain-Peak" loom high, finds a bare space of earth, sits down. His vanquished foe is not aware the conqueror is near.

The girls are drunken with lust shining from young men's eyes. They are strong with knowledge of marching

blood in young men's veins. They dance till they can stand upon their feet no more and other girls take their place and they, too, weave the mystery and madness of their female pride. Women carry wine-jars and pick their way among the men below the platform. Garments are twitched and girls stay to drink and play at love.

The sages sway with drunkenness and age; with splintery laughter bid each other to take heed that if they go too far with wine or women, their rule will weaken on the morrow. But soon they, too, forget. Even the Chief is nodding in his chair.

The koo-kyu drains to silence; the dancing girls are gone. The Chief totters to his feet, waves an unsteady sleeve:

"Where is that Man-from-Nowhere? That foreign imp? That boy? That Hero of our Kin? Let him come forward to choose his woman!"

Takawo sits silent, loath to be discovered. The Chief's wine-dimmed eyes search the faces in the flickering lights. At last he rivets his glance upon Takawo.

"Stand up! Choose your companion for the month or until that hour when you leave for the next sortie. And let me give you counsel: if you wish a comfortable bed, choose a fat mate; if you want wisdom, choose one as old as the knotted pine; if you wish to hang as in a rope, take one as slender as the willow, a woman who is young!"

With beating heart, Takawo faces Chief Ken-Jin.

"I know her whom I would choose. She is not fat. I think she must have wisdom but she is not old. She is indeed like the willow, for she is slender. She is young. But she will not be a rope about my neck, for I find her beautiful. Her name is Nadja!"

His words raise from darkness a field of cold and hating

eyes; each glance a spear. Then across that region of embattled silence a voice flames out:

"No, not Nadja. She is mine! Her.mother willed it. You dare not choose . . ." Rikoo-sieu has spoken.

The Chief stands up, raises his arms above his head. His anger is the hissing serpent's tongue.

"Peace! Am I your Chief? Would you decide for me?"

Wheeling his eyes toward Takawo, Ken-Jin goes on: "Nadja may not be chosen. Forget her and turn your eyes where gratitude should lie. Choose rather the widow of 'Pine-and-Wind,' for she is without a mate and she is given you, and freely, by our Mai-Sai law. You fulfilled the duty to the dead and may enjoy the benefits of your dead brother's house and mate. Remember, widows are like tidbits left after the feast: in them the flavor has settled and they make the more rare eating."

Takawo raises his face and speaks: "I cannot taste food without desire for it. If I cannot choose her whom I find beautiful, I offer my right of choice to him who has won the combats after me."

He nods in the direction of "Mountain-Peak" who now turns his heavy head and glares at Takawo in hatred and disdain.

Now falls a hail of broken curses at Takawo: "Man-from-Nowhere. . . . Man from Devil's Land . . . won the combat by a demon's trick . . . the Moon has blasted him . . . he has no sex!"

But through these cries, a faint and gentle voice whispers close at hand:

"Ah, have pity on him, he is young."

Quickly Takawo turns and sees flitting past him that same girl who has given him the kerchief at the fight.

He rises, bludgeoned by curses of men, jeers of women, takes his way among them, and follows that fleeing figure until once more he stands alone in the outer shadow of the square.

The girl has disappeared but he sees at some distance a post pointing toward heaven and against it tied, a body writhing as in pain. He goes toward it, and discovers in the faint gleam that now pervades the air from the rising moon, a man, his head sunken upon his chest, his hands tied behind his back, his knees pressed together as if in agony and chill.

Takawo draws near. The stranger raises his head and then averts it with so desperate and terrified a glance Muto feels pity welling in his heart.

"Be not afraid, for I come not to harm but to give you aid."

The man raises his head and his eyes are filled with supplication and despair.

Takawo goes on: "I come here not as a guard but as one who feels himself alien and alone. Will you speak with me?"

The man makes a few small movements with his lips, but no word is audible.

The young man waits, wondering who this may be and hating them who have put such pain upon one so close his end.

Now the stranger moves his lips and words are audible:

"Bring me only a few drops of opium else I die!"

"But I am without opium, how then can I bring you some?"

The man breathes brokenly and lets the blue light of the moon shine upon his face.

"Undo my hands and I shall find its price within my girdle."

Takawo goes to the back of the post and cuts the rope that ties the stranger's hands. The nails are broken; the fingers bleed at their tips; Takawo gives him water and again the stranger speaks:

"I am well aware it is honor among your Kin not to search a hostage until the Day of Judgment, but I beg you to take the gold about my waist and give it to your Chief. Ask him to accept the gold and in return buy opium and send it to my son who even now must die for lack of it."

He stops again and sags until he half lies, half sits upon the ground. Takawo takes his arm and steadies him. The stranger speaks:

"My son I thought to save from women and from games of chance by giving him the sweeter solace of opium. Thus he might be able to endure the monotony of one woman and remain without desire for gambling. When I was young I amassed a large fortune but fearing to lose it in wild spending, I became an opium-eater. So strange and beautiful were the dreams it gave me and so without need was I for the false gods of this world, I thought I could give no better gift than opium to this son I love. But I did not think I should be dragged from home and he be left without the means of obtaining that escape which opium gives. I beg of you then to perform this service for me. Take the gold and ask your Chief this favor!"

"This will I gladly do. But tell me, are you not Lord Hee-Chin whose house we raided in the Village of Bei-Chio?"

"I am indeed he. But hasten, else I die!"

"Would you take the means to save your life if I should offer you the way?"

"What true escape is there from suffering as long as thought stays with me? As for my own death, that is welcome. It is for my son, I beg you hasten!"

"Then wait here and I shall ask the Chief his pleasure!"

Takawo runs quickly toward that Place of Festival where even now rises the muffled sound of men and women at love within the darkness.

The Chief is not upon his chair. Takawo seeks in the prostrate crowd. He finds Ken-Jin at last. His eyes are closed, his head rests upon the shoulder of a Sage, his voice drones a melancholy chant.

Takawo stands close before the Chief becomes aware of him, then the old man starts, lifts his wrinkled lids, and jerks his head as if to rid himself of some phantom bird upon his shoulder.

Young Muto speaks:

"Honored Master, I have a confession to make to you. I have untied the rope that bound a prisoner."

The Chief's voice climbs the stair of anger.

"You untied . . . there is but one who dares touch the rope binding a hostage. Are you become the worm in the heart of the tiger?"

"Your prisoner is dying. His hands are bleeding with the hours of agony he has endured. He is too weak to run away and I wished to save him. Perhaps he may write his will in favor of the Kin of the Everlasting Evergreen."

The anger of the Chief collapses. His voice is gentle when he speaks:

"You are young and yet you use every corner of your mind."

Then turning toward two men nearby, Ken-Jin commands:

"Bring our hostage here!"

Takawo waits in silence while the prisoner is brought. Hee-Chin droops between the hands that hold him. His head sags, touching the hem of his own dress.

Then Muto speaks: "Your hostage, Master, has asked me to make to you his last and ardent wish. Only this, to take the gold about his waist and in turn send opium to his son who, he tells me, even now dies for lack of it."

The Chief listens. His voice flames high when Takawo has ceased.

"No! That gold is the blood of tenants. It shall be returned to those who have suffered at his hands. Hee-Chin's guilt is great, but of that we shall not speak until the Day of Judgment. If his son die, let him die. It is not well for Mai-Sai men that the family of Hee-Chin endure. Yet to ease the sufferings of this pitiful creature, let him eat opium, and as much as he desires."

The prisoner looks up with flashing glance of fury:

"I shall take none, for it would be to reënter life again, to know still further misery. This gold about my waist is yours if you will send the opium to my son!"

"No, 'Flame-of-the-Tiger' will not go to him. This is final!"

The Chief rises to his feet, grows tall in his awakened rage, turning to the young guardsmen cries:

"Search him! Take whatever weapon he may have, for men of this metal hold life worthless unless they have their dreams."

The young men carry off the Master of the House of Hee-Chin-Ho. The Chief and Takawo are left facing one

another. That ancient symbol of the Mai-Sai law subsides to man again. With a friendly smile he turns to Takawo:

"Come, drink with me, for I behold in you the seeds of a true hero! You thought of this poor creature even in the midst of festival. Who else but a man whose country is Nowhere would have remembered him?"

He reaches to the ground and finds a bowl, offers it to Muto who holds it high as if to drink. The Chief peers into the cup, sees it empty, cries aloud, his voice quavering a little with fatigue:

"Come, Nadja. Serve your hero with the wine!"

At once there glides forward from the shadows, that cowled and lovely girl who has appeared before. As she comes close with a lithe and gentle undulation of her body, Takawo's fingers tighten on the bowl. She bends near, raises her wine-jar to her shoulder and is about to tip it forward when a thin voice lashes from the darkness near:

"Stop! I shall pour the wine!"

The face of Rikoo-sieu, guardian of the girl, swims up from darkness.

The Chief rises to his feet, his voice an unsheathed sword.

"It is I who bade her come! My word is law!"

"Her mother willed that I . . ."

"I am your Chief and Symbol of the Will of All!"

"Be rid of this demon-boy! He is like the winter wind on a toothless mouth. We can't laugh but we feel the pain. Tell him to be gone!"

Takawo holds the bowl and Nadja pours; he drinks and bending toward her speaks in a voice so low she alone may hear:

"This cannot be our last meeting!"

Her head droops, then she raises her eyes and he sees tears sparkling on the lashes.

Ken-Jin commands:

"Man-from-Nowhere, bid my drummers beat the signal for the dawn! Best hasten, for the hours before the day are few!"

Nadja glides away and with his eyes Takawo follows her; then he picks his way among the men, the women, and goes toward the Towers.

He cups his hands and shouts into the darkness:

"Beat the drums, for our Chief would have his people go!"

The drums throb and slowly in the thinning shadows of the night men and women, weary with passion, rise. From their mouths, worn with whisperings of love, comes the cry:

"Long live the Kin of the Eternal Pine; Time without end!"

Across the Square lovers bend their steps to houses which will shelter them till next they change their mates. Old men creep away with icy step.

Takawo remains alone.

The night was thinning. In that moon-gloom Takawo seemed to walk an endless plain though actually his steps had taken him down the village street. His destination he did not know nor care to know, so oppressed was he by the sense he was an alien, an exile. He recalled that day upon Mount Tai when he had laid him down to sleep, when the earth had been covered by the golden sand strewn by the wind from the Gobi Desert. So life had seemed to him al-

ways: substance, ever obscured by vision: fact by fantasy. Being of this nature all ambition was rendered barren. And yet when he thought to turn aside from fulfillment of his pledge to Lee, her face appeared before him, the halo of his longing making of her a compelling shrine to which the faith in his own spirit's truth bowed down in adoration.

If he failed Lee, he would fail his own integrity and lose the homeland of his spirit. From the earth where his body had been nourished he had been exiled, but from the beauty that was the root-soil of his soul, from that he need not part....

Suddenly across the borders of his consciousness a figure darted more tangible than the shadows of his mind. The figure came near, then nearer. It was a woman. She was close. Nadja! She was sobbing!

He put his hand upon her shoulder and clasped one of her soft firm hands in his.

"Tell me why you are abroad at this strange hour while all others are inside and sleeping?"

His voice was gentle and yet it seemed in nowise to comfort her. The girl's body trembled with the sobs that would not cease and her grief became a pain within his flesh. He felt himself shadowed by an intangible doom. He pressed his arm about her as if he would fend her from all harm and in that contact, their bodies found a single heart, a single pulse, a single breath drawn in a common joy.

Imperceptibly and with slow steps they had come to the House of the Bath. They sat down upon its stair. He did not take his arm from her, rather she seemed the magnet, the sole center of life and warmth in this desolate world in which they were. From her flesh emanated fragrance delicate yet sensual and she was become a flower of perfume

and mystery in this chill night. He unloosed her hair and was drenched in its rich waves. He drew her head close; their cheeks touched; their arms entwined, her breasts swelled to an arch of ecstasy. Her voice small and breathy as a zephyr came.

"Do not leave me, for I am afraid."

"I shall take you away from here. Anywhere you wish; but together, so."

He clasped her closer.... Again and feverishly she begged:

"Take me away! But where may we go in this dark plain?"

"Ah, where may we go in this dark plain?" his heart oppressed by desolation of the wanderer, rang the words within his mind as a deep mourning bell sends waves of music through a twilight world.

Her voice was broken by a sigh, profound and pitiful. Her words shook within the air, even as there came to their ears the mournful and slow winding of a sea-shell horn.

"Too late! Too late!" her voice leaped the stair of terror and ended in a little scream.

From out the shadows behind the House of the Bath, men strode. One spoke:

"You have done evil to a maiden of our Kin. You would take her from our protection and our law!"

The man grasped Nadja. She drew away with a cry.

Suddenly from behind the man who had spoken, appeared the girl's guardian, Rikoo-sieu. He placed a furious hand on her. Takawo leaped forward, but his arms were pinioned. Takawo lashed out his hatred:

"Though you be a Sage and appointed guardian of this girl, you have the heart of a wolf!"

"Wolf! You call me wolf; you who come from Nowhere! We have sheltered, fed you! Yet you call me wolf! Brothers, give him thirty blows with your canes!"

A scream was torn from Nadja's lips; then her words fell like hail. She turned upon the old man, her eyes shooting golden stars of rage.

"What! You think him guilty because he succored me? Know it is I who begged him take me with him! You who were made my guardian, this night turned to a koo-rangoo!"

A hand was clasped across her mouth. With a nod from Rikoo-sieu, Nadja was dragged away. Down the twilight street her voice wailed its grief and terror.

Presently the four men who had first appeared from behind the House of the Bath were increased to seven. The seventh was "Mountain-Peak," grinning the grin of the vanquished who is given unclean power over the victor.

The three men who had joined the four, held long canes. They faced Takawo.

With his eyes the Man-from-Nowhere fixed each one in turn; then spoke, his voice gentle, almost gracious.

"Look upon me, men who have called me Brother and to whom I have done no evil. Know, if your rods kill me, these eyes of mine never will depart from you, but they will haunt you as long as there is breath within your lungs and blood beats in your hearts. I am innocent. But I am prepared to bear the evil you shall do to me, knowing the evil you do unto yourselves to be the greater burden."

"Mountain-Peak" stepped forward with a rope.

Takawo looked up into his face and smiled:

"You do not know your conqueror. You have no need of rope. I accept freely what you give to me."

He kneeled upon the ground and bowed his head.

Two men stepped forward and stood upon his right side. "Mountain-Peak" remained upon his left. Above their heads they held the canes aloft. Rikoo-sieu uttered a cry. The rods descended. They rose again. They fell.

The Man-from-Nowhere pressed his knees together; his nails dug deep into his thighs. He made no sound but only a little moaning bubbled in his brain, trickled down his spine. The strokes were seven; the rods, lacquered with blood, upraised for the eighth, when sounded footsteps, voices.

Ken-Jin appeared in the company of a dozen men bearing flaring torches. The Chief's voice boomed:

"You deserve the beating you received, but no more. Your loyalty to 'Pine-and-Wind' saves you from further punishment."

Then turning to the man behind him, the Chief went on:

"Good Feng, take this man under your roof and shelter him. Soon we shall decide his fate. Meanwhile heal his wounds and let his spirit sleep! He will have need of strength to meet his destiny!"

In the shadow in the house that was Takawo's refuge, Feng and his new mate whispered together:

"But what has happened that our Brother-from-Nowhere lies as if caught in an evil dream?"

"He was beaten by order of Sage Rikoo-sieu."

"Beaten? Of what evil was he guilty then?"

"It is a long tale. Do you recall the oath made by Rikoo-sieu to Nadja's mother? That he would guard her maiden-hood until she passed her seventeenth year?"

"I have heard of it many times. A foolish oath!"

"But remember her mother was not one of us but a hostage from Russia who lived among us. Her thoughts were strange though her deeds were pure. Before she died she bade Rikoo-sieu keep this vow. But to-night when Nadja returned from the games, our Sage thought to teach her body-wisdom. But she had been touched by the affection of the spring for this young man. She fled from her guardian and ran into the street. There it chanced this young man did walk. The two met, but our Sage had followed Nadja. When he saw his ward with a man he deemed a stranger, fury seized him. He ordered men to beat the boy. Meanwhile, our Chief was warned of what was taking place. He hastened, stayed the rods and saved our brother from his doom."

"I am sorry this young man was beaten, for brave and skilled he was in combat and dutiful to 'Pine-and-Wind.' Yet it is a pity Nadja lost the chance of learning body-wisdom from so experienced a man as Rikoo-sieu. Mayhap a youth might have frightened her still more. It is her misfortune she did not understand the good intention of her gracious guardian."

A knocking interrupted their talk. From behind the outer door a boy's voice cried:

"I come from our Great Chief who bids you put this Sacred Water upon the wounds of the Man-from-Nowhere. When the sun has set once more and once more arisen, let him show his face before our Holy Master!"

Two nights passed in fever but with the coming of the appointed day strength rose in Takawo once again. Still his heart was troubled, wondering what fate awaited him at the hands of Chief Ken-Jin.

In the Honored House of the Eternal Pine, the Chief, the Fuju and the boys in blue awaited Takawo and his companion, Feng.

No sooner had Takawo taken his stand upon the rug that spread below the platform than Ken-Jin spoke:

"For many hours I have gazed into the Crystal Ball in which the gods reveal their wisdom. There is but one picture that emerges when I gaze. You bend your back under a burden which you have no eyes to see. You turn toward the West and all about you flies the Golden Wind that obscures clear sight of this world. Your vision misted, you walk on. Though you have been brave and faithful to most of our Mai-Sai laws we cannot keep with us one who carries with him dust from other places, who is burdened by an unseen shadow and whose eyes are filmed by a golden veil. Therefore depart from us! My blessing goes with you and that you may not suffer from thirst or hunger, or from the biting of the wind, I give you this paper on which is written the insignia of our Fraternity. Throughout all China this will bring you aid. Have no fear but start bravely on your pilgrimage!"

The Chief was silent while a gentle smile seemed to play upon his lips. The Fuju stepped forward and gave to Takawo's hand a paper, symbol of the Pine.

Takawo bowed and addressed himself to Chief Ken-Jin.

"You have told me why I may not be counted as a true brother of the Mai-Sai blood. But speak more simply and tell me when I must leave your camp."

"Were best you leave to-morrow morning at the rising of the sun!"

"So soon? Is there some new offense laid on me? My love for Nadja? I would have in no way harmed her."

"The affection of the spring is an unprofitable passion if it be attached to one alone. With us the law is to take a woman so house and bed may be provided and the body breed strong children. But you went contrary to our law and refused to take a mate. Herein you do resemble one who dwelt among us not long since, one who is exiled now from the Kin of the Eternal Pine. But to return: that you insist on Nadja upsets our discipline and makes you dangerous to our peace and happiness. You are immoral. Therefore you must go, and soon!"

Takawo bowed again: "Master, I accept my fate knowing you speak the will of all. Since I cannot live according to your law, it is indeed best I go."

The Chief bent forward and in a voice of friendliness went on:

"Come near that I may the more easily speak with you."

Takawo took one stride closer to the Chief.

That ancient man went on:

"I am well aware that such a man as you might have been preferred by Nadja's mother. Ah, she was a miracle; she saved the dying and cared for the sick. But her thoughts were strange, not useful to our pleasure. Nadja is like her and I wish I might give her to you. I cannot, our law is stronger than my will."

Quickly the Chief glanced about him as if fearing some enemy, then in lowered voice he addressed Feng who stood at hand:

"Even in the Wall of China there are cracks!"

"Even in the Wall of China there are cracks!" Feng repeated and disappeared behind the tapestry.

Within a moment there came the sound of gentle feet moving slowly. The curtain was held aside by unseen hands. Nadja walked into the hall. Her brown hair was tied with a straw, her eyes bent upon the ground, her slender body dressed in a coat of scarlet. Upon her breasts her hands were clasped and the cheeks shadowed by her hair, were pale.

The Chief beckoned her and she went slowly and took her place beside Takawo.

"Bring the Water and the Bowl!" The voice of the Chief was sonorous and strong. The boys in blue obeyed.

The Chief rose, came forward, spoke:

"Approach, sit down upon the platform, then face one another."

With wondering heart and eyes Nadja and Takawo obeyed.

"Nearer! Nearer! Do not be afraid, for in your eyes I have seen the affection of the spring. But desire will burn until it burns away. Our law forbids your union in the body, but I shall bind you in the Wedding of the Ko-one. This is given only when heroes go to face their death. But this young Man-from-Nowhere must be exiled. He shall depart from us never to return. If in memory you dwell with one another then in another life you may be happy. Take the bowl, Brother, and drink from it and give to Nadja your parting wish!"

Takawo took the bowl and drank the water and raising his eyes, heavy with parting, spoke:

"Be faithful to your own self, Nadja, for you are beautiful. Be happy!" His voice fell away to silence. He could say no more.

She, raising her eyes in turn, addressed herself to him:

"You who are come to me carrying the spirit of my mother whom I loved, know this, that though the sunlight of my days will pass through the cloud of my tears, always thought of you will restore me to light again!"

She ceased, but still her face was raised and in that long calm glance she gave, Takawo knew her gentle and lovely spirit completely surrendered unto him.

"The Ceremony of Ko-one is at an end. Nadja, retire to the House of Women!"

Slowly and with downcast eyes Nadja went her way. Takawo felt his heart was gone with her.

Gentle was the voice of the Chief now when he spoke:

"Young Man-from-Nowhere, keep that paper given you and when you reach the Village of Soo-Ling seek out Shyo-Foo-Kay who is a true friend to Mai-Sai. And now, farewell. It is a pity you have so strange a nature, seeking what you cannot own. Had you been different you might have dwelt among us happily. Fare-thee-well!"

He turned and followed by the boys in blue, went slowly from the room.

At sunrise on the appointed day Takawo bade farewell to Feng and upon the horse given him by his host turned his face toward the West and rode into the tawny plain before him.

His horse would have followed the old trail toward the

Elm that was the rendezvous of the Kin of the Everlasting Evergreen but Takawo had other plans. Feng had warned him to avoid the Village of Bei-Chio and make directly for the Hamlet of Soo-Ling where dwelt that person whose name the Chief had given him.

That day young Muto rode and witnessed how the yellow earth was locked in winter. A heavy frost had congealed the ground until it seemed all set in crystal. Here and there a shin-tree rose in strong rhythm against the blank horizon and now and then from huts so low they scarcely raised their roofs above the ground, a coolie peered, his head rising like a specter from the death-like stillness of his dwelling-place.

"Whence do you come and whither do you go?" cried these men as Takawo rode by and always Takawo's answer was the same:

"Where I go I cannot tell and I come from Nowhere."

The laughter that followed seemed the barking of desolate beasts, so strangely did it slide along the air; and in Takawo's mind kept reëchoing long hours after, as if that wintry world through which he rode had caught the cruel mirth of men and mocked him in his exile. Congealed to stone his heart then seemed and to draw breath was heavy burden; but as the sun rose higher in the day, his spirit lifted and warmed by the remembrance of the mission he had undertaken on behalf of Lee, he pressed resolutely forward.

At sunset at the gate of the Village of Soo-Ling a guard stopped him.

"Why is the gate locked when the sun is not yet set?"

"Bandits prowl and we have treasure."

Takawo smiled: "What may be the treasure of this

hamlet? It seems small and not the residence of men of wealth!"

"Soldiers stationed here have many horses. Bandits can always use a horse. Your horse? You could sell him at a good price."

The guard touched the beast's mouth and raised the upper lip. Meanwhile Takawo eyed the man and pondered how much wit was hidden in that coolie-head. It was well that Feng had given him for disguise the garb of pilgrim.

"You have nothing to smoke as you keep the watch?" Takawo's voice was friendly, casual.

"Nothing. No pay for six months. A cheat! Our watch is long. No sleep, no smoke, no food, no pay. Umph! What a life for a talented young man!"

"Take this." Muto gave him twenty coppers.

"You want to enter? Got some friends?"

"No, I have no friends. Tell me of an inn."

"One inside the gate, but crowded. Lots of soldiers. Watch your horse!"

"Thanks!"

The gate swung open. Young Muto cantered in and came at once into a courtyard of stone, of broken wagons, of ragged men, of filth.

Takawo would have ridden on but from a shabby sagging house ran a boy who took his horse and offered him hospitality at the tavern.

Accepting what Fate gave to him even in these small matters, Takawo dismounted.

"Fasten my horse and guard it."

The boy bowed and tethered the horse to a wooden post in the yard.

Takawo entered the house, walked across a dirt floor, thence up three steps. In one corner of a large room ran a wooden railing. An old woman droned within.

To her Takawo made plea for food and it was brought. When he had done eating he bought wine and offered some to the old woman. She drank with him and when a little time had passed, Muto asked carelessly:

"I have been told that Shyo-Foo-Kay dwells in your town. Can you tell me where this person lives?"

The old woman grinned and spoke:

"Why not? Shyo-Foo-Kay has opened a shop. You'll find that place at the far end of the Dai-Gai Alley. But be careful else you'll get slapped!"

"Ay, you'll get slapped!" This last phrase was repeated by an old man who came shuffling toward Takawo.

"Ah, Shyo-Foo-Kay has opened a tow-foo shop but tow-foo isn't for throwing in men's faces! Shyo-Foo-Kay is a strange merchant!" The old man crinkled up his dried-raisin eyes. The woman leered.

Takawo rose, paid and left the house. He stepped out upon the threshold and looked toward the post where the boy had tethered his horse. There the boy lounged, but the horse was gone.

Takawo called:

"What! Have you eaten the horse or caused the Devil to steal him away?"

"Honored Sir, they took him. He was so fine a horse they said it was too bad to leave him."

"Who are they who so approve my animal they steal it from me? Can't they at least ask me for the steed?"

"They never ask. They take. It's the government. They need horses for the war."

"The soldiers?"

"Yes."

"I'll go after them!"

"You go after them?" The boy laughed. "You run after and take the dust out of the wind? Be glad they like your horse. It's an honor!"

Takawo shrugged his shoulders, stopped a moment, thought to reënter the tavern and demand restitution for his loss, but knowing it wise to call no attention to himself, he strode off as if toward his destination. When he was out of sight of the inn, he walked at random to kill the daylight hours.

Deeming it wise that he seem casual in his wanderings about the village, he made a circuit of its streets and not till dark had come did he ask the way to the Alley of Dai-Gai.

That short street was shadowed by thick pines and the chill air that dripped from them was odorous and strong. Now and then the cold early-winter moon sent its silvery sabers through the great beard of needles upon the twisted boughs. Suddenly the trees halted as if a whispered word had stopped them in their march, and the ground was a flood of blue. The moon having all of heaven to itself, poured down its rays in a cool steady cataract to the waiting earth, making of it a sea eerie in its stillness and its peace. Takawo gazed and saw a little house frail as a skiff riding on that sea.

With a half-wistful, half-fearful longing in his heart, a smile upon his lips, wondering what new string Fate might jerk to make him dance to the music of its will, Takawo

knocked upon a door across which had been painted in lettering of black: Shop of Tow-Foo.

Silence passed him like a wind. He was cold and weary. He waited. Knocked again. A tiny latticed window opened in the door and a light was held close to the bars. No face was visible within but Takawo was aware that his own was being close-examined. At last, a voice young and cadenced like a girl's, said sharply:

"Who knocks so late when all my house is dark? Know you not I am weary from my day?"

Certain he had heard that voice in some other place and time, Takawo started back. Bewildered, wondering, he made answer:

"I beg that your kind heart will forgive I come at this late hour, but I thought it unwise to come before. I, too, am weary, for I have traveled far and have no friend but you."

"But me?"

"Yes, or rather the Master of this house. Does not Shyo-Foo-Kay dwell here?"

There was a rustling sound behind the lattice and again Takawo was aware that his own features were being closely scrutinized in the light of that upheld lamp. That voice haunting as an old music, now went on:

"Ah, indeed, Shyo-Foo-Kay does dwell here. But tell me first whence you came and to what horizon do you bend your step?"

"I am come from Nowhere and I go toward the West, for there I have been told my life may be a happy one."

Another silence and then the woman's voice fell to a lower key:

"Do you not come from—Fire?"

Takawo's heart leaped at the familiar password of Mai-Sai.

"Lady and Gracious Hostess who hides herself from me, I come from—Water!"

At once the lattice was shut, the lamp quenched. Cautiously the door was opened.

"Come in and quickly!"

The young man stepped across the threshold and saw through a paper screen a light from within which was diffused dimly and before this the lady stood. Takawo found her outline slim and of gracious form and gesture. But no clear revelation of her features was made in that soft light, rather she seemed a goddess of mystery standing before the realm of the unknown.

Now the voice that echoed down the corridors of memory lifted itself in the amber colored gloom:

"Here in my shop I shall light no lamp, for the natives of this hamlet know this is one of my first days of trade and I needs must sleep early. If a light were visible from the street they would question me. Then, too, the soldiers are abroad and suspect I am not unfriendly to Mai-Sai."

There was a little pause and then rather to hear her voice than intent upon the words, Takawo asked:

"But tell me, is not the Master home?"

Laughter tinkled past his ear:

"Shyo-Foo-Kay is indeed the Master; but Shyo-Foo-Kay is my name! As for the rest, trade will be master of my days; at night I am master of myself."

He would have questioned further this piquant mysterious lady but now she disappeared behind the paper screen through which a light shone faintly and again Takawo thought of her as some supernal creature who a moment

before had guarded the realm of the unknown but now had plunged into it, leaving him disconsolate, alone.

This illusion was shattered speedily, for now her silhouette moved back and forth weaving some pattern of household duty. First came the sound of an object large and soft being dragged across the floor, and then he saw her bending to arrange it there. Now her steps made a pattering away; woman-garments rustled, and then her shade came gliding back into the compass of the screen. Her snug, close-fitted jacket and trousers were exchanged for a mystery of flowing gown and long cascading hair. Her silhouette grew large, came near. Again she entered the shop and spoke:

"It is late. I am tired and even now have prepared my bed. Take this garment. It was the night-robe of my husband. Wear this and when you have prepared yourself, enter, lie down, and sleep. There is no other bed than mine. As for water, in that distant corner there is a bowl upon the floor."

She left him, having put upon his arm a man's night-gown of blue. Takawo stared at the illumined screen behind which his hostess had disappeared. Certain he was he had seen this girl before, had heard her speak, had loved her, for every cadence of her voice, every gesture of her hand, every movement of her body was a complement to an obscure longing that had been aroused by a living woman in another place and time.

Across this torment of his searching thought, the girl's voice now flung a bridge:

"You who come to me from Nowhere, do you not know I must be up with the coming of the dawn?"

Quickly he undressed, bathed, put on the night-robe

she had given him. He took the sliding screen into his hands and pushed it to one side.

That inner room gleamed in the light of a small lantern; the walls, the tabourets, the desk, the wardrobe; all so daintily fresh and new it seemed the whole had been conceived in a mood of mockery at the ordinary human dwelling. Indeed it seemed spun from sugar, a delectable interior that might be sweet upon the tongue as well as charming to the eye.

On the floor-bed, under a richly embroidered coverlet lay a woman, whose shoulders clad in a robe the color of new leaves gently raised and let fall the silken robe thrown over her.

Takawo saw nothing of her face but the round averted cheek. She had turned her back upon him.

With feet so numb they seemed bound in cloth, Takawo moved toward the bed. He stooped, bent low, lifted the corner of the quilt.

She did not turn round. It was her voice that greeted him:

"The cold wind will enter if you stand holding that corner so."

He dropped to his knees.

Her command went on:

"You sleep there; I, here. Because the bed-clothes are short, I beg you not to pull."

Bewildered he let his eyes wander across the bed and saw it had been arranged so their heads might rest at opposite ends.

He was lifting up the quilt still further, when suddenly in memory he heard and as clearly as if the voice were in the room with him, his Grandfather saying: "Remember,

all women are so, soft and lovely, but dangerous as the serpent." Then, as if echoing him, came another counsel, that of the scholar-shepherd on Mount Tai:

"Go toward the West and beware of lovely women. . . ."

With sudden hatred of these men, cautious with old age, Takawo crept inside the coverlets and lay down.

He was stiff upon his bed, waiting for the smallest signal she might give. Kay spoke at last, but more as from a dream than with an awakened mind:

"Oh, there is something I've forgotten."

"Yes?"

"It is something I forget always."

"Yes?"

"Close your eyes, I'll bring it."

His eyes snapped shut, but behind the locked lids his pupils stared. The mattress under him was a burning stone. He heard her soft and rustling movements, heard her pattering feet, then again he felt her near.

For one moment he undid his eyes. She was kneeling in the center of their bed. Then she crept below the covers, stretched herself, sighed, spoke:

"Now at last I can be happy!"

Slowly and deliciously Takawo stretched his legs. Suddenly they met an object, large, warm and of stubborn bulk. Quickly he drew his feet away. His voice lashed out:

"Shyo-Foo-Kay, what is it?"

Sleepily her answer came:

"The stove. It comforts me on these cold nights."

He would have beaten her if he had followed his desire. She lay still. He could feel the gentle lift and fall of her breasts as they agitated the quilts. She seemed to purr as the contented cat.

Behind the resentful-desirous curtain of that moment, the faces of other women waited. For the present they were of another world. This woman was near. Nearer to him in body than any woman he had known. If she had found him distasteful, why then had she asked him to her bed?

Was she asleep? Was she laughing secretly at him? He listened intently, longed to hear her soft breath drawn in sweet anticipation. He was the boy no longer, would not be! Lee, Nadja! Yes, he had found them beautiful. Would he be doomed always to pass within the shadow of beauty, never hold reality within his arms?

He moved toward her, gently, slowly. If he could but touch her foot he would know if she were sleeping. Inch by inch he proceeded. She was lying on the right side of the stove; he on the left. He arranged his body cautiously so it, too, lay upon the right. With trembling heart, as the explorer might penetrate the uncharted region of a continent unknown, he went forward. In that mysterious and delicious country of desire, what beasts of his own timidity lurked to thrust him back? He closed his eyes, and behind the lids suns blazed. In those minutes of his body's progress toward her, a thousand pictures flashed, so broken, torn, illumined, marvelous, it seemed a universe was born and died within his gaze.

Ah, and he knew he was ridiculous! Why, this very house with its gay hidden laughter, its mockery of man, rocked with merriment at the absurd figure that he made. Stubbornly he shut his thought to this, for every moment brought him nearer the warm and sweetly-scented environ of her body.

Then he touched her foot. She did not move. He touched

it again. It was elegant, slim. With sensitized toes, he began to creep up the leg. The skin was silken, the flesh firm, swelling toward the knee.

He stopped, for with that touch upon her leg he seemed to find eyes to see it in the dark. He saw it brown and shining, silken, veined with blue.

He put his toes back, moved up another inch. The room, the house, the world was heavy with desire, and dark.

All at once her voice hurled a dagger of lightning, crashing that world to bits:

"I have said I am Master of my Nights. Beware!"

He drew his foot away. He was scorched by the flaming of her scorn.

"Why don't you show yourself in your shop? I've walked past three or four times waiting to behold your gracious face!"

"Why don't you knock and come in?"

"Because I thought you had not risen and I wanted most of all to see you!"

"Well, be quick. How do you want your tow-foo, through silk or linen?"

"Through linen, for winter is come and I must be strong."

"Then bring your basket here, for these cakes are soft and will break if you do not hasten."

"But how white your hands, almost as white as the bean-cake."

"Don't put your hands near. See, you have made me break this. Now you must take it as it is. What you need is a dash of cold water in the morning!"

"Be it ever so cold, Shyo-Foo-Kay, from you it would warm me."

"Take these to your waiting wife. You must come and get a hundred cakes before receiving one sweet word from me."

"A thousand times would be little enough to get a water-lily word from your mouth. But tell me, did not a stranger come in this direction? Last night he was at the Inn and asked for your shop and later a boy gave him directions how to reach you. Bandits often go disguised."

"Bandits? Don't you think I know my own brother? For many years he's been at sea and last evening he passed through here on his way to the City of Eiko, where he's engaged for labor."

"Then he's left?"

"Shall I flatter myself you are jealous of my brother? You are like the new horse, but I shall teach you to walk backward!"

Suddenly from behind the screen came the sound of splashing water, the sputtering of a man and then that strangely haunting voice of Shyo-Foo-Kay.

"You come here to find me alone! I am alone, but without fear. I shall rather close my shop than endure customers like you!"

Heavy steps shook the little house; grumbling of a man; quick patter of woman's feet; then the screen slid back within its groove.

In the early morning light Takawo sat up in bed, for he had been wakened by this talk within the shop.

At the entrance to the living-room Shyo-Foo-Kay paused,

for the face of Takawo shone with astonishment and recognition.

Kay's features clear at last in the light of day released from memory a lady standing on a balcony lit dimly by a little lamp, a lady wearing a moon-pale night-gown that shone upon her breasts and fell in gleaming panels to embroidered golden shoes; a lady whose hair streamed in deep and shadowed rivers past the perfect oval of her face and whose eyes of bronze looked up from the delicate ivory of smooth lids.

His voice came slowly, fearing to shatter the vision of the past entwined now with the reality of the present.

"Can it indeed be you?"

"How easily your memory let me die!"

"Forget you? But not until this moment have you permitted light to shine upon your face! And that Lady of the House of Shadows, her I thought never to see again!"

"Am I changed?"

"Not changed; two women merged in one!"

"I knew you at once!"

"At the lattice window in the door?"

"When I heard your voice I thought, 'This voice has lived with me in quite another place.' When I lifted up my lantern, then I knew!"

"Your voice did haunt me."

"Last night you did not guess?"

"Last night least of all! But tell me you who are so gay, so candid, and so human, can you be she who on that night in the Shadowed House came to me along the balcony. I thought of you then as a lady who had glided down the moon-ladder from Heaven, for there where my comrade

lay, indeed where every room held its dead, you were calm and without the faintest show of fear."

"That is a story which will not make you merry. Now I must hasten and be prepared for trade. You heard that man who even now ran from me. I think he came here to spy. There may be danger for you in my house: I must be ready with my cakes else the villagers will have wide eyes. Now I shall go into my shop. Do you dress and I shall bring you food. Though I think you slept little, you did indeed sleep late."

Again that soft music of merriment touched his ears and he looked at her and found her lovelier in the frank light of morning than in the dim glow of lanterns. He would have kept her with him but she padded away and soon he heard her astir within her shop.

In the next half-hour she returned bringing a cake of shio-roo; she found him dressed, awaiting her.

"No, I shall not eat with you, for I break my fast by the light of dying stars. At least in this new life I lead. I see the dawn. This never could have come to pass in my old existence in the House of Lord Hee-Chin."

Takawo did not reply but ate in silence and watched her as she moved nimbly about the room. When all was in the neat and smiling order that seemed the blossoming of her harmonious mind, she went toward a shrine in the far corner of the small apartment.

There she lit incense and knelt down.

Takawo rose and went toward her.

"May I kneel beside you and do honor to the dead?"

"It is my husband's shrine. Do you wish to do penance for a sin?"

He knelt beside her so his eyes were level with her own.

"Perhaps, for sins not yet committed."

She turned aside her face but he had seen the gleaming of a smile within her eyes. They bowed their heads the while the incense stole softly up the staircase of the air. Their lips murmured.

The morning passed with Shyo-Foo-Kay busy in her shop. With noontime she came back into her living-room and found Takawo kneeling beside the stove that had been the wall between them on the night before. She smiled.

"Ah, I see you have kept the fire burning."

"I have done my best."

"I can live without a husband but not without a fire!"

"Do you underrate the merits of a husband?"

"Not at all, but I cannot praise too much the comforts of a fire."

"At night especially do you value its usefulness!"

"At night, especially."

She laughed, then changed to a face of mockery of grief.

"This afternoon, I must perform a task I dread."

"And what is that?"

"You will see, for you cannot escape it. But no man can labor without food so I shall fetch a bean-cake. We shall eat what is prepared and to-night make a leisurely meal."

She brought from the shop a bean-cake sprinkled with sauce of China and took from the stove cold rice on which she poured hot tea. Their small repast done, she left Takawo and from her shop her voice invited him:

"Please come and help me carry the Foundation of my Fate."

He stepped into the tiny space odorous with fermenting

beans and found Shyo-Foo-Kay embracing a large circular stone which was placed upon another of similar shape and size. Both rested in a deep vat of wood.

"But what am I to do with these?"

"Patience! Ask no questions, but help me carry. How wise of the gods to send you!"

From her arms Takawo took the first stone and placed it in the living-room. He returned.

"And this one, too?"

"Of course, they are a happily mated pair. One could not live without the other."

He carried the second great stone and placed it on the first. She followed after, lugging the vat along the floor.

"You must put the stones in this, for what the stones grind the vat catches. What falls into the vat you may compare to words of wisdom which no sage man dares waste. I, being a woman, think of the gold this vat may bring me."

Next she brought a dipper of water and a large wooden bowl in which beans were soaking. She knelt down beside the stones which were in position one upon the other. With her left hand she fed beans into the hole in the center of the stones and with her right grasped a wooden and bamboo handle which extended above the top of the upper stone. It was no easy task. Takawo saw where he might aid. At once her expression of stubborn concentration vanished:

"Ah, that is lighter, but not so fast. The beans will then grind coarse."

"Like this?"

"Yes, for then I am able to wander with my thoughts. When I am in the shop I must tread quickly among the words of others. Here it is quiet and I wish to be at peace."

Where their fingers touched a warm small river of tenderness began to flow. As the moments ticked themselves away words seemed inharmonious with their mood, but at last when the silence between them became rich with thought, her voice lashed suddenly:

"Hungry demons hound you! Don't you see we grind and grind, and yet between the stones there is nothing?"

He raised his eyes and gazed at her intently while he answered:

"Yes, we grind and grind and yet there is nothing between the stones. Is not life always like this?"

She did not answer but at once dipped her hand into the wooden bowl and pushed the beans down the hole at the center of the stone. In her eyes a small smile gleamed:

"Now you are speaking like a scholar. Do not cease, you play the part so well!"

He winced, feeling in her tone the indulgence of maturity. She saw the hurt. Her voice became tender, a little shy:

"Tell me a little about yourself. Whence do you come and whither do you go? I did ask you this before you entered my house even while I stood and held the lantern that I might see your face, but then it was rather to hear the password from your lips than to listen to the pattern of your tale."

She glanced up at him and he found beautiful the subtlety of her eyes, coloring, the ivory of her lids, the shining jet of the lashes' fringe.

He put his arms above hers on the stone and as their arms moved together in a slow and steady rhythm, answered:

"I have said I come from Nowhere and whither I go no

man can tell. I am like the feather that is blown from the breast of the swan who glides away in the shadows of the secret pool. That feather is taken by the wind and where it will rest no one can say."

"Feather?" She tilted her lovely face toward the ceiling; the delicate brows lifted:

"Feather? Pretty enough, but too light to ride upon."

"True enough, but thus I am the more likely to follow the faint pointings of Fate. There is one I seek, for I have made a vow!"

"One you seek?" She put a few beans into the hole and without glancing at him, went on softly:

"What you say is true of most men. If you seek you are not distinguished."

"I am searching for a man."

"Interesting yet disappointing!"

"But rather tell me about you. Have you not promised me?"

"Perhaps I shall tell you the more clearly if I begin with the story of some one else, a man who came to me while I was yet married; like yourself, a stranger from nowhere. When I look at you, I think of him and recall my own happier days. Especially do I recall one day not so long ago when I was sitting near the window, the warm air blowing in upon me. A morning-glory was entwined within the lattice. This stranger was standing near. I was at peace. Perhaps he was like the evil warm wind from the South, but I cannot think so. On that day he spoke to me of his wanderings. Like you he had come to our house from a Mai-Sai village but he was not Mai-Sai by birth and of his childhood he said little. Indeed only this did he tell me of his life, that all his days he had loved but one lady and that

due to the vicissitudes of war he had lost her, and now she had become the wife of another."

Takawo raised his eyes, for such pathos was woven in her voice he was reminded of Lee-Kwan-Tien and with what profound feeling she had told her tale that evening in the General's Hareem. The young man begged for a pause in which he might question her:

"Tell me, Gracious Hostess, did this man have the dialect of Shanshi?"

Shyo-Foo-Kay turned to him in wonder:

"Yes, but why do you ask this?"

"Because in certain ways he resembles the man I seek. I once gave to a lovely lady a vow that in my wanderings I should try and find a certain Captain Loo and bring word to him that she still loves him and the child she carries is his own."

"The child she carries?"

"Yes. Was Captain Loo this wanderer's name?"

The sudden fire of excitement that had flamed in her eyes died, and she answered with flat weariness:

"No, but I think the name he gave me was not his."

"When he went from you whither did he turn his step?"

"That, too, he kept secret from me, but I have learned he went to the West to devote himself to worship of the dead."

"To a temple?"

"To a temple upon Mount Shan-Tao and from there his fame as teacher and healer begins to spread to all places where live the sick and the unhappy."

The shadow of a longing darkened her face; still Takawo persisted, deeming it necessary to ignore the pain that talk of this mysterious stranger caused her:

"Can you recall the name of the lady whom he loved?"

"No, that I cannot; but she, too, came from Shanshi."

"It may indeed be the man I seek."

Shyo-Foo-Kay folded her hands and raised her eyes and searched Takawo's own.

"You think this to be the man you seek because you are afraid of your own loneliness. I am determined this is not the man, for then I should be left without the solace of a dream. You spoke of me as one who came to you down the moon-ladder from Heaven; so this stranger seemed to me and in my hours of remembrance I picture him as mounting that stair and returning to that perfect place. I cannot bear to think that he lives and I not near him. In order to forget those hours when through him, all the earth did speak to me with an awakened music, I am become the casual, unlovely creature that you see."

"Unlovely? That you can remember in this wise proves the contrary."

He would have ceased the slow grinding of the stone had he but dared and would have touched her hands in some gentle communication but now her voice leaped suddenly into the key of half-mocking coquetry. She said crisply:

"Tell me, Young Man who speaks like a sage, you made a vow to a lady you found beautiful and yet you seek the man who loves her? Is it the part of youth to sacrifice itself thus?"

"For me it is no sacrifice."

"Perhaps this may seem presumptuous to you, but tell me how it is, you who are so young, find existence pleasurable in living for the sake of others?"

"It is not for the sake of others that I seek this man, but rather for the lack of strength within myself. My days and

years have no plan but to live out the period of an exile which I have taken willingly. If in that time I may learn a little wisdom I shall deem myself blessed. To learn wisdom one must listen to the smallest whispering of Fate and follow it. The lady of whom I spoke blessed me with a mission that gives plan and pattern to my days."

"You endure an exile willingly? What sin have you, so young, so inexperienced, committed?"

"No great sin, Gracious Hostess, but I bear a burden the strange thinking of men has put upon me."

"I perceive you do not wish to speak of this further and I respect your silence." Then with a swift delicious arching of the brows she added, "When I tell my story, perhaps I may be of a little use to you in your pursuit of wisdom."

Takawo ceased the rhythm of the stone, and looked at Shyo-Foo-Kay long and steadily:

"This morning when I lay upon my bed, I heard within your shop a customer say he would wait with infinite patience for a water-lily word from your mouth. Indeed to listen to your voice is like hearing the soft sudden music of the lily's opening after the long silence of the night."

"It is because the sun shines upon it that the lily wakens." She gave him the full radiance of her eyes, and resuming the slow circling of the stone, began:

"It may be that my vanity wishes to believe this, but, I think, had Fate been more kind my husband might have been an artist of renown. However that Fickle Mistress of Men turned her face from him and all his days he remained a humble carver of wood employed by Lord Hee-Chin to work on his elegant dwelling in the Village of Bei-Chio.

"One day my Lord Hee-Chin came to speak with my husband. I was sitting in the room where they talked.

After that day Lord Hee-Chin came daily but always when my husband was not home. At last one morning he told me I must go away with him.

" 'If your husband refuses I shall dismiss him; being discarded from my household no one else will dare employ him. All this you may tell him and on the morrow I shall send a messenger to receive your answer.'

"That night I told my husband all the Lord of Hee-Chin had said to me. For a long time, Tai-Joo looked at me in silence and then spoke:

" 'Let it be as he wishes!'

"I was hurt deeply that he showed no pride nor jealousy and for the time I hated him. When the steward of Lord Hee-Chin came on the morrow I went away, for I was too young to understand my husband might have loved me with such wisdom that he chose for me comfort and security rather than starvation. I saw only his lack of love.

"Soon after Lord Hee-Chin took me to live in his great house on which even then my husband was employed. One morning when I looked from our window and saw my husband working on a ledge nearby, I became so blinded with pain that he had let me go from him without so much as farewell that in turn I wished to hurt him. I drew Lord Hee-Chin to my side and urged him to go out with me upon the balcony. No sooner did my husband see us, as indeed I had intended that he should, than his hands began to tremble and before the breath of a scream could pass my lips, he slipped suddenly and fell."

As Shyo-Foo-Kay spoke these words, tears made tender her subtle eyes and Takawo hastened to speed her thought away from remembrance of her pain.

"Tell me, Gracious Hostess, how it came about that I

found you in the House of Shadows on that night when I came to fetch my brother home?"

"This, too, is no simple tale. Soon after my husband died, my Master set the day of our wedding. Meanwhile my heart had turned against him, for I had come to understand it was because of him and my own cruel blindness that my husband had met his death. I did not wish to wed Lord Hee-Chin. I told him so. He would not listen to me; instead he made preparations for our marriage. All this I watched with heavy heart.

"Finally I devised a plan. By secret messenger I sent word to my husband's Mai-Sai brothers, the Kin of the Eternal Pine, and told Chief Ken-Jin my plight. Then Ken-Jin warned my Lord that if he went forward with the wedding, vengeance of Mai-Sai would follow. But to this warning my Master paid no heed.

"The day of wedding came. I was unwilling, but my Lord persisted. The day passed. At night the wedding-feast was celebrated in that great hall through which you passed. I remember well those hours, for momently I listened for sound of man or horse. Throughout the feast I waited; adorned for festival and with a heart of funeral.

"But it was not until I was in my bed and my Lord Hee-Chin had entered my room and all the house was still that I heard at last the welcome music of many feet and the cries of 'Ryu-Shyo' outside the wall."

Takawo ceased the grinding of the stone and looked at her.

"Gentle Kay, I cannot understand why you returned to that House after the combat was at end?"

"Your comrade whom you found dead came to my apartment seeking Hee-Chin. My Lord fought with him.

In the scuffle I could not tell whether your comrade had been killed or wounded, for presently other Mai Sai men came and captured Hee Chin, and I was led away. Tell me how fared Lord Hee Chin in the Mai Sai camp? Now that I have escaped the necessity of living with him, I can wish him well."

"Alas, I fear his life will end shortly, for when I saw him last he was pitiful; yet withal a certain dignity remained."

Shye Lee Kay's face was shadowed with remembrance, but at once she hastened to speak of other matters.

"But tell me, what grave dangers awaited you on that journey of the dead?"

"If there were dangers I have forgotten them, for in beholding you I discover one who has the nature of water above which the willow droops. In listening to your voice I am nourished by the courage and the strength of your spirit. Thus does the water nourish the willow that bends low toward it, finding no sweeter pleasure than in touching the pure stream in which it finds its true reflection."

Her eyelids fluttered, her lips paled and when she spoke her voice was rich with laughter and with tears:

"Do not cease though you make a little pain in my heart; do not cease, for your words make a gentle music like rain upon my ears."

"It is because of the beauty of your spirit that you find my words fitting, but tell me yet more about yourself. How can it be you have chosen a life so different from the one you led in the House of Lord Hee Chin?"

"It is precisely because it is different that I find it good. All day I must talk with strangers who have no love for me. I must think sharply and forget all that has gone be-

fore. As for the shop itself, I bought it with the money I received from the sale of my jewels. Then, too, my shop brings wisdom, for here a child may tell her joys, an old woman confess her grief, or a student-sage speak to me of visions he has seen. Ah, but you have told me so little about yourself!"

"There is, alas, little to tell; yet because at this moment I feel you have the heart of a mother, a refuge I do ever seek, I shall speak frankly to you all that it is in my province to tell."

"At the very beginning of my travels a scholar-shepherd warned me to eschew companionship of lovely women. But this I have been unable to do, for the further I wander from my native land, the more ardently I long to rest my head in the lap of beauty. In Chio-Foo I met that lady to whom I made the vow; in the Camp of the Eternal Pine I found one to whom I was wedded by the ceremony of Ko-one; and now...."

His voice hung distilled within the air. Then seeing the subtle expectation in her eyes, he added:

"Now Fate has let me discover you!"

At this a pale tremor passed across the face of Shyo-Foo-Kay. Then suddenly her features were contracted with a sharp intensity. Her voice flung out:

"Evil fall upon that scholar-shepherd! Why should you beware of lovely women? Could he not see that yours is the nature of the poet and women are but reflections of the single beauty that you seek?"

In the wake of these words, stillness followed; then Kay went on, her voice strangely sorrowful and tender:

"You do remind me once again of that stranger, for he, too, gave away all happiness in this world to live a life

quite alien to him. From here he went to devote his days to worship of the dead."

Takawo raised his eyes and looked at her intently. Then with his gaze caressing the contours of her face, he spoke:

"I cannot wish to resemble this stranger in all ways, for love is life and the law of nature is injured if one cannot go on loving what is living."

Shyo-Foo-Kay looked long at Takawo and again tenderness was in her voice:

"Ah, do you not know that you are false to yourself when you speak so? You do not live according to this principle, for you do not take love where you find it, but keep forever before your eyes a vision and a memory, or perhaps the prophecy of some perfect love that keeps you from affection close at hand. For this reason do I find you beautiful and I beg you do not change else I should feel I have been mistaken and should be saddened, having placed my faith in one whose heart is false to its own self."

Takawo turned aside his face. Then he spoke softly, almost to himself:

"Perhaps I, being young, fear the full brightness of the Sun, the full responsibilities of love."

"You talk like a woman! Are you Father-Mother-God from a Far Land? Will you, too, sit in shadows with prayer-beads in your hands?"

Aware keenly of the mockery and pain in her voice he took shelter in another thought:

"You tell me this guest went to dwell in the Temple of Mysterious Heaven that is built upon Mount Shan! How beautiful his life must be! How eager am I to find him there!"

Shyo-Foo-Kay rose and pushed the handle from her.

She tucked her little hands into her sleeves, stood so, withdrawn and still. In a whisper her words came:

"What a waste to do worship to the dead when the living die for lack of love!"

She walked from him and presently Takawo heard her moving softly within the compass of her tiny shop.

In the moments that followed silence seemed to slope down and drain into the heavy twilight that was creeping in upon the little house. The gentle padding of Shyo-Foo-Kay's feet, the few scattered sounds she made, rendered only the more oppressed and lonely the heart of Takawo. If he might go to her and they might find together some escape from that night that was creeping in upon them!

Without her, the room seemed chill and he was reminded that when he had first seen this little house he had thought it frail as a skiff upon a sea. So frail, too, her life, and his! Together might they not cheat that Demon-Fate that would send him always toward an unknown horizon, and Kay to the memory of a love that had borne no fruit but dreams?

He rose to go to her and speak what was in his mind when came suddenly a wild gust of rain, thrumming with stubborn fury against the paper-windows; came, too, the sound of rain upon an umbrella of paper; then the clatter of wooden shoes upon a stone; then the opening of a door; and then a woman-stranger's voice within the house:

"Think of the men out on a night like this!"

"I did not know, Boo-Chan, that your husband worked at night!"

"Work! The watch at the gate is no easy task!"

"But your husband is not one of the soldiers?"

"No, I'd starve then, for the soldiers haven't been paid

for a year. But now all men have to play at soldiery. Well, I'll take my bean-cakes strained through linen, for my husband will be hungry about midnight."

"So the war has started again, Boo-Chan?"

"No, Shyo-Foo-Kay, not the war but the bandits. Last month they raided the Village of Bei-Chio and where there's a fire, sparks fly. You can't tell where they'll fall."

"So it's against the banditry they guard?"

"Yes, Shyo-Foo-Kay, and with your pretty face you'd better keep guard, too. We never saw a woman keeping a shop alone. But after all, maybe bandits aren't so evil. I'd like to see one close at hand. A long time ago, at night I saw a company of them riding past our house. They looked so tall, so strong. Are they all handsome?"

"Boo-Chan, you might think so, but I doubt if your husband would agree!"

"My husband would agree with the Dragon but never with me! Well, to-night I'm going to be alone. You can't think what it is to be a married woman. Fifteen years now: the same man, the same house, the same talk. But now he is to be away all night. I can eat alone. This evening I'll have my bean-cake on a bamboo-stick as I did in childhood. My husband laughs at me when I do; but it tastes better. When I've done eating, I'll peer through the curtain. Who knows but a bandit may go riding by? They can't be kept out by walls and guns."

"You don't seem to fear them!"

"No, why should I be afraid? The soldiers want to do the robbing, so they make us keep away the bandits. At least the bandits take from the rich alone. Did any one weep when Lord Hee-Chin lost his house in the Village of Bei-Chio?"

"No, at least, his tenants did not weep."

"Such a tenant would be more foolish than the Doo-Ryo, for his house was full of rice-bags and their houses were full of hunger; his women were dressed in scarlet; their women were dressed in tears. No, the bandits aren't the worst fate can befall us. Then, too, I'd like to see a man who can walk like a man. When my husband moves it's as if he had a hundred stones tied to his toes."

"Remember, Boo-Chan, your husband lives quietly in his shop; Mai-Sai men live in the saddle."

"Yes, and they ride as lightly as the wind. They look neither to the North nor to the South; neither to the West nor to the East, and yet they know all things. My husband knows only what the Shoo-Cho tells him."

Soft laughter from Shyo-Foo-Kay followed this confession from her customer; and then through the rain that was now become strong and steady, clattered another pair of wooden shoes, the door opened, and then the voice of a third woman was added to those behind the screen:

"So, Boo-Chan, you are here before me? Hostess of the Tow-Foo Shop, you have good trade?"

"With Boo-Chan here I am insured good luck and sound business!"

Soft chuckling laughter from Boo-Chan and then the thin restless chatter began again:

"Shyo-Foo-Kay, you are a brave woman, starting a shop in a strange village where no one knows you and you've no friends. Aren't you afraid to be alone on a night like this? My husband says he hated to leave me alone but there's danger abroad. I hear the soldiers may search the houses."

In a tone that seemed to Takawo, deliberately casual, Shyo-Foo-Kay asked:

"Then, Towan-Kee, your husband, too, is on guard?"

"Yes, and for that reason I'll treat myself to a little bean-cake strained through silk. Some for him, too, through linen."

"Four of each?"

"Four for him; and well, let it be two for me. I eat with the mouth of a mouse."

"So, Towan-Kee, you are trying to keep young and court your husband?"

"My husband, Boo-Chan, isn't a year younger than me and there's no man handsomer in all the village. Only to-night I was in tears when I saw the clouds come up, for I'd just finished combing his hair and I was afraid the rain would spoil it. His queue is almost to his heels since I added those two extra shek of cord. You can't think how it swings when he walks."

"You talk like a bride, Towan-Kee."

"Boo-Chan, I feel like a bride! I'm sure it is no sin to feel young."

Behind the screen the voices had risen. Takawo smiled when he heard his hostess asking:

"You say, Boo-Chan, you want your beans through linen?"

"Through linen, Shyo-Foo-Kay, and five of them. Being middle-aged I care for comfort, not for beauty."

"You'd care for beauty if your husband cared for his. My husband waxes the end of his queue so it'll stay smooth."

"My husband's treasurer of the village and has other queues to count than his own. I suppose your husband's heart will break when his queue gets wet?"

"Your husband's queue is not half as long as my husband's and your husband's waist is twice as big."

"You said only a while ago, that you added cord to make your husband's queue long. It's no distinction to have a man with false hair!"

The words came fast, treading one upon the other; the thin voice, the fat voice sparring for advantage. Takawo laughed a little to himself, but there was in his laughter a nerve of uneasiness. He wished these women to be gone so he might speak with Shyo-Foo-Kay and learn from her how serious she considered the news they had brought her regarding the watch against the bandits.

But now his attention was diverted once again by the wisdom of his hostess, for he heard her saying:

"Boo-Chan and Towan-Kee, if your village faces danger at the hands of bandits and your men are out in this storm to guard your persons and your homes, is it not fitting their women guard their tongues and tempers?"

Laughter followed, then the rustling of clothes, the clatter of shoes. The thin piping voice, now softened with friendliness, began:

"Boo-Chan, will you steal across your garden after our men are gone and eat with me? There is much I could tell about my neighbor's new wife . . . and let me have, Gracious Shyo-Foo-Kay, two more bean-cakes strained through silk for my kind friend here, Boo-Chan."

"Oh, Towan-Kee, two is too much. A little less else I grow fat as the Green Frog. One will do!"

"One? Are you a mouse that you would starve yourself? Come, Hostess, two! Let us celebrate when our men are away! Even the Dried Bean knows it's a seldom joy!"

"How much, Shyo-Foo-Kay, do I owe?"

"Eight coppers, Towan-Kee."

"And I had five, through linen."

"Yours is five coppers. Carry your baskets carefully, for the meal is newly ground."

"Then farewell, Shyo-Foo-Kay, and beware! Soldiers or bandits: both grow lonely on rainy nights. If I were young and pretty as you, I'd lock my door!"

"Thank you, Towan-Kee, for your counsel; but to lock the door is to invite the thief. I leave mine open and so no man dares enter."

There followed a cautious stillness, then Kay entered the living-room and faced Takawo. Her face was flushed; her voice trembled.

"Have you heard?"

"Yes, I have heard."

"This means a warning or a threat. I cannot look into the hearts of these women and tell if they bear me evil or wish to keep off danger that is close at hand. But for you, this is serious news. By to-morrow and the coming of day you must be gone."

"To bring harm upon you would be ill thanks for gracious hospitality. I must go and quickly."

Takawo went close to her and took her hand. She raised her eyes and looked at him.

"It was so with that stranger whom I loved. He left to keep us from the punishment that would fall if we were discovered to harbor a bandit in our house."

"Strangely do I follow in the footsteps of this man! It seems I have become rather the shadow of another than a man ruling his own destiny."

"To rule destiny is more than human. Do you desire the powers of a god?"

"Yes, if I might stay with you this night, yet bring no ill upon you!"

She raised her hands; a wistful smile trembled on her lips.

"Listen to the storm! The guards are fearful men; they will not roam the streets till this violence abates. Stay then, for I fear to be alone. It is sweet to lie down to dreams while rain sings upon the roof. Let us make a hasty meal and do you stay until that secret hour that comes before the dawn."

They supped and while the storm still thrummed upon the little house, Takawo lay down with Kay upon the futon and in love and tenderness they heard the desolate night come on; in her warm arms he found the solace of forgetfulness and for those brief hours he deemed he had come home and no longer wandered on this earth an exile.

THE TEMPLE OF MYSTERIOUS HEAVEN

Young leaves were red upon the branches of the willow-tree when Takawo Muto came into the Village of Jin-Soon, lying at the foot of Mount Shan.

On this gray and chill spring morning he had only to raise his eyes and far up the rocky solemn slope he could distinguish the Temple of Mysterious Heaven.

Below in the valley men walked, circling great fires, beating upon their chests, and chanting, for the scourge of smallpox had fallen upon many and even as Takawo trod the field with hesitating step he saw lying without the compass of the flames, the sick who turned toward the living, faces pallid with the death that was at hand.

Takawo walked within the circle of a fire and finding no man paid him heed, he placed himself before one with the air and aspect of an elder, and to him addressed these words:

"Reverend Master, if for a moment you will take your thought from your afflictions, to point out to me the road to the Temple of Mysterious Heaven, I shall be grateful."

The Elder raised his head frozen with age and weariness and saw in the gray and eerie light that lies upon the earth before the dawn, a young man well accoutered.

"The road to Mysterious Heaven is for those who have been purified. You are young and have the look of the world about you. Remain in our hamlet for the space of three days and then I shall point out the path that leads to healing of all sins."

"But, Honored Sire, I am a stranger to this place. How then am I to remain for the space of three days within your village?"

Hardly had these words fallen from the young man's lips when there came clustering about him from out the shadows of the morning, old men who gazed at him with kindling eyes. For many moments they said nothing, then one more ancient than the others, spoke:

"No, I fear he is no fitting guest for me."

Now another old man murmured, wearily walking away as his voice faded in the air like a thin smoke:

"Ah, no, and he is not suitable for my dwelling."

Sadly the old men gazed at Takawo and their eyes which had been warmed by curiosity subsided into the dull apathy of age. They went from him and returned to their slow circling of the fire and to their monotonous chant.

Now the Elder whom he had first addressed raised his eyes:

"Follow, for with me you may dwell until the Day of Purity is come."

He led the way out of that dreary field and toward a river that was gleaming palely between clumps of ancient pines. As they drew near that spectral water which seemed to move like a faint breath along the banks, Takawo perceived that here and there under the trees were piled stones with household goods upon them.

"Who dwells here?" the young man asked, but he had

no need of question, for as the two penetrated further into the wood Takawo beheld, in the blue-green gloom, men and women, loathsome with disease. Even as Takawo and his ancient guide passed by, these creatures fastened upon them the glance of death, and on their parched lips unuttered words remained.

The young man shivered and begged his companion to pause and give succour to the dying but the old man did not heed his plea and kept on stubbornly as if these sights were too usual to be worthy of his thought.

At this moment came to Takawo's memory the young and fresh voice of Shyo-Foo-Kay speaking: "What a waste to do worship to the dead when the living die for lack of love!" With this, came rebellion at the curious pilgrimage he had undertaken; ever from the living and the lovely and into the way of shadows, the unknown.

Consumed by this musing, Takawo had not observed that the guide had led him out from the dense forest and they had come close to the river-bank and here was presented a bridge of exceeding age and carven from a single stone. At a little distance above this was a waterfall and to the music of its shattered waters, Takawo now placed his foot upon the archway of the rock.

But scarcely had he done so when the Elder turned upon him with flaming eye and in a voice stiff with prophecy and law, cried out:

"This Sacred Bridge was built not by Man but by the Dragon who dwells beneath! Tread carefully its stone, for if your shadow fall upon the stream, the Dragon will draw you down to death!"

Cautiously the Elder paced his steps forward and Takawo followed. He would have found it in his heart to

smile indulgently at the oracular mien of his guide but even as his lips curled there fell upon his brow and upon his cheek a mist. This region which he walked now seemed enchanted. Musing, he went slowly on, his eyes fastened on the stone he trod. Some brightening of the air as if great wings of white did pass him by, caused him to lift up his head, and he found the dawn had come and in that subtle and tender flush that prophesies the rising of the sun, two shrines appeared and above them a willow drooping its roseate boughs.

The beauty of this scene following so close upon the gloom of decay and death filled Takawo with joy and when he spoke, his words were cadenced like a song:

"How marvelous this bridge fashioned from a single stone; how beautiful these houses consecrated to the gods; how emblazoned with spring the willow that bends above!"

But to this the Elder paid no heed and in a voice of command and habit, spoke:

"These shrines are little temples of the Sho-ki demons. Come then and worship!"

He led the way and Takawo found himself upon the kneeling-stone of the first small shrine. He faced a lattice-work and saw through it the immense and naked body of a Sho-ki, horrible of face and gesture, holding in the one hand a cudgel spiked with iron. The uncovered body was painted red. The teeth were gold.

The Elder knelt and for tradition's sake, Takawo knelt beside him. But in his heart was sudden hatred of this demon, hatred of the pilgrimage he had undertaken, hatred of that mysterious captain-priest who surrounded his temple with horror and with death.

Had the way been open, Takawo would have turned and

fled, but even now the voice of the Elder whispered in his ear:

"Worship according to your state!"

The young man became aware that at the feet of the Sho-ki were scattered rice and coins; and taking from his pouch a handful of sen-mai he threw them through the latticed door.

The Elder rose and led Takawo to the second shrine. Here the Sho-ki was painted green with teeth of silver. Here, too, coins must be scattered and a prayer intoned.

Having risen from unwilling worship of this demon, Takawo followed his aged companion down a lane that presently became a village street and so freshly decorated were the houses they seemed designed rather for festival than for the dwelling-place of sober men. Here were shops festooned with towels dyed in sacred waters; here slippers for the feet of pilgrims; there candies for impatient children; here incense; and clustering like strange birds, immense hats for bending pious heads.

"Why is your village newly decked?" Takawo inquired.

"Our prosperity is but a babe in months. It is born of that miracle that has come to us. Our Great Priest has lived here but a little while and yet in that brief time he has performed so many wonders that from North and South, from East and West, come men to seek his cures. Before his advent, our village was deserted and fast falling to decay."

"From whence came your great Teacher? What is his name?"

"We call him Mee-Hoo-Shy and he descended to us from Mysterious Heaven itself. But that is a tale that cannot be told in a breath."

The old man hastened his step as though he wished to speak no further and they arrived presently before a two-story building spanned by a balcony and with a great lantern hanging at its door.

The Elder entered and Takawo followed. He was met by two maid-servants. The one bathed his feet and the other carried his bundle to the floor above. Ablutions made, the two men mounted the stair.

The room which they entered was small and appeared a hallway or a platform to the world outside, for a large casement opened upon the balcony and gave view of the Sacred Pond and the springtime fields beyond.

Now the Elder's voice had lost the solemn punctuation of the holy man. It was crisp and turned glibly on its words.

"We hope, Young Gentleman, that our hand will in all ways reach to your convenience. But if you will not think I intrude upon your freedom, I must warn you, though our maid-servants be young and fresh, here in our village the earth is sacred and there must come to pass no affection of the spring. This I say, not in fear for our maids, but rather to protect you from the evil that might fall should you indulge in the unholy passion."

"Honored Host, if I should wish to indulge in the affection of the spring I should choose a different setting than this Pilgrim's Village. You may rest without fear either for your maids or for your guest. But, Inn-Master, may I ask you to provide a pillow for my elbow?"

At this request the Elder permitted himself a smile and putting his withered hands together, bowed:

"Ah, you speak like a nobleman or scholar! Let us see! Yes, to be sure, we shall try!"

He left the room with surprising speed and returned

within the quarter-hour bearing a pillow-stand of lacquer with an orange silken pillow tied thereon.

"This a visiting nobleman gave us many moons ago," he placed the tabouret upon the floor, "and now the time is fitting for refreshment and repose."

The door opened and there entered a little maid in green jacket and trousers, bearing a box of lacquer, two bowls, and a pot of tea.

When the maid had padded from the room, the old man seated himself upon the floor below the low desk on which the tea-things had been set. Takawo understood the gesture and placed himself in such wise he might gaze from the open casement and still turn attentive face toward his host.

"It is customary at these times when my house harbors an honored guest that I open this lacquer box and offer the candied orange sweetened and made fragrant by the sun. In this way we are reminded that our pilgrims journey, like the sun, both far and wide. So thinking, we are better able to break the bars of silence. Tell me, Young Gentleman, where is your home?"

"My home, Venerable Host, is beyond the China Sea but in the past year I have traveled far so it is more true to say I come from Nowhere."

The Elder glanced at Takawo with shrewdly lowered lids and his voice was a whisper when he spoke:

"Ah, I understand! You come to be cured of one of those intimate affairs. Well, we shall ask no more. Still, you do not show it; there are no signs upon you."

"No signs? To bear the symbol of Nowhere were a subtle business!"

The Elder looked up with kindling curiosity, then continued in a muted voice:

"When you came to us, walking in the field, this early morning, it troubled our Elders to hear you ask the road to Mysterious Heaven, for you bore upon you no sign that you were in need of cure."

Many moments Takawo stared at the old man for he was bewildered by his words; then slowly the significance of this speech came to him. He recalled with a certain shock the loathsome faces of the dying he had seen in the wood of gloom, and understanding that most pilgrims who came here were, for the larger part, the sick, he preferred to drop the matter and turned the talk away.

"I am come to your village, Master, because I seek a certain man."

The Elder brightened.

"That is easy. I can help you, for there is no one in this hamlet I do not know. Even the lodging houses are not so large but I can count the guests. What is his name?"

But suddenly Takawo, realizing the unwisdom of his remark, gazed vaguely through the window and replied:

"His name I have forgotten, but when I gaze upon his face I shall know him. Perhaps some early morning before the day is born I may recall his name or perhaps the wind will tell it me."

Discreetly the Inn-Master offered the box of preserved fruits, then spoke, his voice formal and faintly cautious:

"These oranges were brought by a guest from Shanshi. He bade me offer them to those pilgrims I wish to honor."

The young man smiled acknowledgment of this courtesy, then remarked as casually as he might:

"Have you many guests who come from Shanshi?"

"Yes, many of the pilgrims come from Shanshi, for there have been whisperings that if our Great Priest were born

of woman and lived a life like other men, he came not from the Region of Mysterious Heaven, but from the province of Shanshi. But to our minds, this is a heresy not to be encouraged. The pious will not have it so."

Reverently the old man folded his thin fingers and gazed at them. Takawo imagined his host was murmuring a prayer. This moment, then, seemed to the young man propitious for a question regarding the subject that lay closest to his heart:

"Will you not tell me a little about this Temple of Mysterious Heaven, and the High Priest there?"

With the air of a scholar instructing a young student the Inn-Master drew out a long pipe, filled and lit it, drew a few fragrant puffs, began:

"Centuries ago a disciple of Confucius built this Temple that you see upon the summit of Mount Shan. Since that time many priests have lived there; priests both good and evil. I am old enough to remember well the priest who dwelt there last. He was young and his eyebrows were like the new moon so the hearts of women melted toward him. He was beautiful, and this a priest in safety may not be.

"One day he made a journey to Hon-Sien where he met a lovely girl. She had the nature of the burning serpent, her skin was like the sunset and her precious body like the incense-burner.

"Secretly, in our Temple, these two lived together for the period of six years. That time I remember well, for often did I wonder why at night the Temple Bell did not ring and why prayers that should have been wafted on the wind were never spoken. Few and fewer pilgrims came to our village. Worshipers seldom saw their priest; even the odor of incense did not fill the Holy Place. The Temple be-

came deserted and our people were hungry, for the life of our hamlet is bound with the fortunes of our priest."

There was a pause while the old man gazed from the open casement toward the Sacred Pond where even now steam was rising like a cloud, making of the pilgrims who bathed in it phantoms who wavered fitfully in the pearly air.

The ancient voice went on:

"Ah, I remember well that weary time! But I am hastening my tale too quickly. Yet you should know that all events that come hereafter he told me in confession on his bed of death.

"To return then to that time before the end: the lady whom Ma-Kwai loved became always more beautiful. But suddenly one day that skin of sunset turned the color of the ripe plum and the hair of her eyebrow fell. He knew then leprosy had come to dwell in her. Prayers that had been forgotten for many years sounded once again; the Temple Bells began to ring; the incense to burn. But no worshipers came and the supplication to the gods was made too late.

"Then from out the village our children disappeared. We thought the Dragon of the Bridge had stolen them away. One night a hero guarded the ancient stone to slay the Dragon, but at the hour of the Bull, our young priest in the manner of a demon, came carrying a child upon his back.

"To the Temple, men of our village followed him and I went with them. There we learned that the girl whom he had loved had so infected him with madness, crying out the flesh of children alone could be her cure, that he, too, had lost his wit. We would have killed him had he not then

been near to death with heart-break for her who was dying there before his eyes. Upon the selfsame hour the two passed out of life.

"To our village came storms; then dry weather and no rice grew upon our fields. Leaves fell though the season was midsummer, and the sound of no pilgrim's foot was heard upon the Bridge. The people did not eat and through our roof we did behold the moon. Grass grew up between our flowers, yet this village had been our home for generations and we longed to stay. At last we knew we must depart. Houses were left empty and we went up and down, seeking food and work as beggars do.

"So passed more than thirty years and then one day in a strange city some of our villagers met together and we thought to return to look upon our homes. We began our journey back, weary of heart and many of us grown old. We had no hope to stay, but there were among us those who did not wish to die without seeing our Sacred Bridge again. One night at the Season of Shyoon, we came through the wood to the Dragon's Bridge. In order to traverse it, our Elders went forward, but upon its center stood a man in white.

"Because his garb was death's, we deemed him a shade or wandering spirit, but when he turned his face toward us and the light of the moon shone upon it, we saw he was young and of exceeding peace. We knelt down saying: 'At last is come to us a Savior from the Holy Place who will lead us to safety once again.'

"Then the vision smiled and one of our elders spoke:

" 'Spirit-Priest whose face is lovely with the moon, do you wait to bless us who are come home again?'

"The Apparition made this answer:

" 'I am no holy man whose blessing is like dew upon your heads. I am but a wandering pilgrim who is happy with the feather of Paradise in my pillow or a bit of straw under my neck.'

"So saying, he went before us and we followed him. Indeed, since that night we have followed him completely, for he is the perfect man for priest. Buddha could not have been more just than he. He brings us new lives and happy ones. Never shall we lose him out of memory, neither we who are old nor those who are yet unborn."

"I wish I might have the honor of looking on his face," softly Takawo let fall these words, for so reverent the silence that had stolen in upon them.

"Mee-Hoo-Shy is like the hanging cloud upon the hillside. It looks near but we may never touch it. He is a man of divine strength and simple heart. He is glad to see the merchant of wealth who is pure in spirit; and he welcomes the beggar who has no possession but his trotting legs."

"Must I wait three days before I come into his presence? Having listened to you, I desire to hasten to him that he may erase all spots from my heart."

"You must wait three days before your foot dare touch the threshold of Mysterious Heaven."

The old man rose and with a vague and weary smile stole from the room and so silently he vanished, Takawo scarcely noticed he had been left alone, for his eyes were brooding on the distant scene.

That night when Takawo had supped and had fallen into a deep sleep, he dreamed a dream:

He saw two fireflies float in the shining night and he knew the one was himself and the other the High Priest of Mysterious Heaven. He beheld the flies dance upon the air and felt upon his cheek the small breeze of their aerial combat. In the midst of that gleaming darkness, a white flower grew, pure and delicate as if spun from ice, and to this blossom the flies fluttered, brushing their wings one against the other. Suddenly a great wind rose and they were hurled together on the ground. A rain fell. They lay as dead. Slowly the drops became small until they were a gentle dew and Takawo felt the sweetness of it on his face. He wakened and a breeze fragrant with spring was entering his room. The Temple Bell was ringing. When he had dressed and gone out into the dawn, he walked the fields beyond the Sacred Pond, where a cloud of smoke floated fitfully before his eyes. When he came near it was always far, and at last he became weary and sat down to rest.

His hands wandered in the grass and plucked a few spears of green and when he perceived young flies clustering on them, he knew the smoke that had fled across the field were these frail creatures who swarm in earliest spring. Then softly in memory he heard the voice of his mother singing and his thoughts ran on:

"In childhood, spring was to me the sweetness of a mother's love and her tender eyes upon me; but now spring is darkness and desolation in my heart."

But even as recollection wandered in the past, he heard from no great distance the sound of a little bell and the music of two voices, the one a woman's, the other a man's. He rose and walked toward the clump of pine from which they came. Hastening his step and scarcely heeding the

dripping of the dew from the branches of the trees, he came upon a little clearing in the wood and before a statue of Buddha a young man and woman kneeled. The young man was singing to the woman as she bowed her face before their god:

"Do not weep, Ay-Shai, for the love of a mother is strong, and our child is happy in the Holy Land! Do not weep, Ay-Shai, for the love of a mother is strong and your tears will draw him back so he will wander in the Middle-air, in the world between the living and the dead."

The young father rose and went toward a pine that was gnarled with age and from a spring at its root he took water and poured it over the Buddha.

Again he sang:

"From the Time of Snow to the Time of Snow we shall come to sing a thousand prayers. Our child will be unhappy if its mother cries her grief. Come, Ay-Shai, dry the dew from out your eyes!"

The young man took the woman's hand and helped her rise. She smiled and together they went their way, down a little slope, and so were lost; and after them plaintive and small, sounded the little bell the woman carried in her hand.

Takawo followed them as far as sight allowed, and then he spoke to his own self:

"To-day I shall climb the mountain, for by this vision of love and tenderness I have been purified and evil thought has been taken from me. I shall not remain in the village for three days. This very morning I shall behold the Temple and, it may be, the man I seek."

For many hours he went his way through deep shadows of the pine and there was no sound but the soft footfall

of his own step. He thought of the future and the past, without fear and calmly:

"Perhaps in time this little stone which my foot touches may be treasured whereas I, in the wide spaces of the world, will disappear. Surely while I walk here, I cannot carry yo in my heart. Perhaps it is the spirit of this man I seek that steals to me down the holy staircase of this path and dreams upon the branches of these trees."

Hardly had these thoughts distilled, when he found the pines were less closely set and the light of morning shone more clearly in upon him. He saw smoke rise close by and heard the tender singing of a bell. Then suddenly as he stepped forward there was visible, through an opening in the forest, two nude statues of gods; the one male, the other female, who raised deformed lascivious arms to one another. Quickly Takawo passed them by as a child runs from the grinning serpent.

Within that hour he stood before the Temple of Mysterious Heaven, stopped within its shadowed door and saw a rope was near his hand. This rope he grasped and a great bell tolled above the roof. Silently, and without the help of man, the door opened and he found himself within a vast space rich with incense and the air so warm and thick it seemed the breath from a thousand throats. But no living thing was there and little light. At last Takawo pierced the shadows with his restless gaze and beheld a company of titan bodies, nude, passionate of posture, and so closely set one against the other that they seemed a writhing forest from a nightmare dream.

For a moment the young man thought to turn aside, to reënter the sunlit morning, but fascination urgent to his flesh, drew him ever on and from one god and goddess to

another did he pass, observing that below them piled were pilgrim-gifts, phallic symbols all, so the feet of divinity were buried in emblems of desire.

Then through a crack between two rafters a beam of sunlight stole, caressing the swelling breasts of a young goddess, and painting with roseate rust the straining thigh of a male divinity. Everywhere a spell seemed cast as if in the whirlwind of orgiastic rites a mighty word had fallen and this great lascivious company had been congealed at the height of ecstasies so fantastic and of so strange a cult that Takawo was seized by a sudden flaming as if all his senses might be welded to a further sense, yet unknown, but promissory of such demoniacal rewards that all his will could not stay the hurricane that beat within.

Before a goddess, budding with a hundred breasts, scarlet with a hundred mouths, he fell upon his knees and to her prayed, not knowing, neither caring if living man might hear:

"You who are the Uttermost and the End, hearken to me. You who encompass Birth as well as Death, you have revealed to me that in your superb fecund despair you have won divinity. Teach me the secret and the life. Show me the way to death and through death the stair to Heaven!

"Teach me the darkness of your ways, Goddess of yo. Shed upon me the mighty illumination of your wisdom. I am small and may be blown away like dust upon the wind but you who have risen from the Earth, you bear upon your breasts, your thighs, the grandeur of fertility. From those scarlet wounds that are your lips I hear the inarticulate cry of life beat upon the Gates of Flesh.

"Mother-Mistress, Goddess-Demon, speak to me and reveal the secret of your immensities!"

His voice ebbed and then like the sea-wave another voice engulfed the Temple in its music:

"Pilgrim, Priest, or Poet, you have won immunity from the punishment that falls upon those wanderers who dare enter here unbidden and unclean. You have penetrated the wisdom of our gods, seen the kernel that is life within the husk of death. Approach and come to me that I may gaze upon so rare a voyager!"

Takawo rose and knew but did not see that an inner door had opened and some fresh small wind had entered. So pure the fragrance of the breeze, laden with the scent of spring-time flowers, it seemed the very gods stood still, abashed.

Then paced softly forward as if on tiger-feet, three young boys in Temple-dress, the first carrying in his hand a bell, the second a steaming bowl, the third a swaying incense-burner. Their faces were pale, their heads shorn and blue, and slowly they beckoned to Takawo to follow them. This he did and came to a carven post where stood a tall man in priest's dress. About his neck were scarlet prayer-beads, his feet were bare, his head bent down.

When the three novices and their pilgrim-guest stood before this man he raised his face and looked at Takawo with so candid and benign an air it seemed the friendly sun had come to dwell in that dark place.

Gazing upon him, unafraid and strangely warmed as if at the greeting of an old-time friend, Takawo saw the man was young but so weather-beaten was his face he seemed more like a soldier in the field than a worshiper of death. His shoulders were broad under the priestly garb, and

there was in his eyes the wisdom of one who has lived within the world.

Now that voice that had seemed like the great rushing of a wave sounded again, but more gently and the patient wise eyes rested on Takawo:

"It may be you are my dream come to dwell with me, for in no other wise can I explain your presence here nor the words of ancient wisdom uttered by your lips. Mayhap you have lived my life, knowing what has gone before and what will come hereafter. It may be you are the spirit shadowing my step, from whom I cannot escape no matter how deeply I am hid. Speak to me, Traveler, and tell me if you are ghost or breathing living man!"

Takawo raised his face, flushed with awakening joy, and spoke:

"Master Teacher, Holy Sire, if I have spoken wisdom it is because it was wrung from my heart, and how ancient the heart is, no man knows. Only this can I tell you, that in my brief life of twenty years I have sought always to touch the beauty that trembles ever in the kernel of all things. Such beauty did I find in a living lady and because of her I am come to your Temple. She sent me out upon a quest at the time when the persimmons were ripening, and her thoughts turned ever to memories of her native home."

The priest bent his head a little to one side and glanced at Takawo quickly.

"Was the lady beautiful and where was her native home?"

"Teacher, she was as beautiful as the plum-blossom shining in the snow. Her home was Shanchi and its mountain slopes."

"Her name?"

"Her name I may not reveal except to him to whom my quest is made. I seek here the Master and the High Priest of this Temple."

At once the boys bowed themselves away, and the tall man gazed at Takawo for many moments. Then in a voice strangely muffled, said: "Follow me!"

The tall man led the way into the shadows of the further Temple and up three shallow steps, and as Takawo followed he thought he saw rising from the head of him who went before, a faint illumination as of the spirit leaving the body; and when they passed the steps the tall man disappeared into an ancient doorway and a priest in orange paced by his side speaking softly in an undertone:

"Our High Priest and Master tells me I am to take you to our Place of Rest."

Takawo glanced quickly at the man.

"Then he, who even now went from me, is your High Priest, the Venerated Mee-Hoo-Shy?"

"Our Holy Master came to us from Mysterious Heaven itself and the Temple that had died is living once again; pilgrims come; our coffers overflow; sins are forgiven; men are purified."

They walked forward down the corridor; thence through a long room where many sat at food but no man raised an eye; and so out over a little bridge to a smaller building and into a great hall whose immense window embraced the view of a garden, a slope, and the valley beyond.

Takawo went to this casement and looked out and saw blossoms of early spring, blossoms of red and of purple. He heard the twittering of birds and then close beneath the window a pool reflected the sky and his own face bent

forward in solemn absorption of the scene. As young Muto gazed, there came creeping along the flat ledge encompassing the water, two small green snakes. From a hidden doorway an ancient man in priest's gown came forward, carrying a long bamboo stick. As he walked he cried aloud:

"Unhappy, unhappy the man whose face floats herein!"

With the end of his staff he picked up the snakes and made as if to carry them away, then paused awhile, and gazed at Takawo's still reflected face. Slowly but clearly the old man spoke, addressing the shadow of Takawo within the pool:

"Unhappy he whose image calls forth these secret snakes: the Snakes of Grinning Fate and the Unworldly Heart."

Then turning about he looked up to the young man leaning from the casement and spoke still further to him:

"I find myself looking upon a serene and lovely countenance and for this reason the serpents came forth to sting. Beware of lingering in any single place, for the tender heart longs to strike root even in the unkindest rock!"

Takawo gazed down upon that ancient face but found no word to answer, so calmly and with so prophetic an air did the old man speak. Then the priest sighed: his face took on a meditative and remote expression and he went on, almost to himself:

"Soon the long and lonesome summer is at hand when growth and life rebuke the old for their mortality. I prefer the winter with its snows; then I am but another frozen withered thing in the white unliving world."

So saying he paced slowly by and disappeared into some shadowed cave below the casement where Takawo leaned.

The priest in orange awaited the young man and began at once to speak:

"Honored Guest, do you come from the South on a ship or from the North on a horse? You are brown from the sun."

"I thank you for your interest, Guide, but I came here on my own foot and I come from Nowhere."

This remark the priest ignored and led Takawo from the Room of Rest and into a small apartment fitted for hospitality.

"You must be tired, for I see the blue vein in your forehead of brown. I offer you not tea, but a drink that has come to us from the West. Have you tasted coffee?"

"Coffee? A beautiful word, and perhaps a more beautiful taste. I welcome the experience."

The priest clapped twice his hands and there entered through a sliding screen three novices, who so resembled those three Takawo had seen pacing in the Temple, he thought them to be the same. These boys glided expertly through the task of serving priest and guest.

"Bring the lump of white sugar in the bowl of black; and the boiling water and rather the spoons of silver than the chopsticks."

All this the boys obeyed and having set a low table on the floor, they disappeared behind the screen. At the one side the priest in orange took his place, at the other Takawo.

The Priest put dark powder into one bowl, and then into the other. Upon this he set small cones of sugar, and on these poured the boiling water. This he stirred. The water became dark, now brown, now black, and there rose to the young man's nostrils an odor new and cheering.

The priest gazed intently at Takawo, then raised his own bowl to his lips, his eyes toward the ceiling, and slowly tasted the steaming liquid. Takawo tasted his, liked the flavor, drank to the bottom of the bowl, stretched out his hand.

"Ah, please, a little more."

The Priest prepared another bowlful and this, too, Takawo drank. As it passed his lips he heard a little tattoo beat within his brain, his blood seemed hotter, and there came over him an excitement reminiscent of his childhood when he had seen clouds fly before a storm. Suddenly he found himself out upon a meadow, racing in this very wind. There he chased a rabbit. Now the meadow dipped, the rabbit flew, and leaped at last into a hole within the ground. Takawo flew after him. The hole was large. He entered, and was enveloped in a singing space all shining white.

"I am afraid you gave him a little too much."

"He liked the flavor and would have more."

"But it is an hour now that he has slept. This may leave him weak."

"Not weak, Master, for though he is young he is like the kurumé nut. Moreover a member of Mai-Sai can stand much 'coffee'."

"I do not believe he is of their blood. Though this paper you found upon him is indeed insignia of the Kin of the Eternal Evergreen, he bears every sign he comes from Nippon."

"Hush! He wakens, better steal away."

"Yes, and change no plan for this evening. Such a man may be invited to our conclave."

"First bring water; it will hasten his wakening."

Sound of footsteps; then the pressure of cold porcelain upon Takawo's lip. The young man opened his eyes that had been shut deceitfully during the space of this conversation.

The tall man whom now Takawo knew to be indeed that man for whom he had made this long and strange pilgrimage, sat before him. He was dressed in a robe of yellow with the Secret Fan of Ivory; his noble countenance was clouded.

Discreetly, Takawo spoke, a little as from a dream:

"Water is refreshing to the memory as well as to the flesh. I think there is some holiness in this water and I taste again the pure spring upon the Sacred Mountain of Liok-Sei."

The tall man smiled. Takawo sat erect, finding a candid friendliness in the High Priest's eyes.

Mee-Hoo-Shy spoke:

"Brother of the Eternal Pine, for I, too, was of that clan, water is indeed 'the source of the earth' as the wisdom of the Clan has it. Men cannot endure without water; it is the love of the mother; it is the tear of the father. But tell me, are you well? It is a pity to have dealt with you so harshly. I did not intend you should receive so much of the Green Flame though I did wish to put you in sleep where I might have your person searched."

The young man gazed at the face of Mee-Hoo-Shy and spoke:

"Once having seen you, I would in all willingness have told you all. For many moons, I have sought you, wishing with the dark half of my heart I might discover you had

died so I should be free to return to that lovely lady for whose sake I undertook my quest."

The tall man bowed his head, his eyes plumbing the eyes of the younger man:

"Tell me when last you saw this lady for whose sake you came?"

"I saw her last in the time when the persimmons were ripe upon the autumn-trees."

"And in what place?"

"In the Hareem of General Ko."

Suddenly the High Priest rose to his feet, his face pale and strangely drawn. With solemn step he paced the room, gazing at Takawo the while, and was about to open his lips and speak again, when there entered a novice who bowed and addressed him:

"Most High Teacher, the pilgrims await you and the Robe of Ceremony is laid out."

The High Priest's voice changed to one of quick command:

"Take this young man, our honored guest, and show him the wonders of the Temple."

Then adding in undertone to Takawo:

"No time is sacred to me; thus am I ever choked with dust of trivial sin."

Mee-Hoo passed from the room. The young boy turned and gazed at Takawo from under a forehead plucked bare of brows, and in the broken voice of earliest manhood, spoke:

"If you follow me I shall take you to the marvels which only eyes of noblemen may see."

They left the room where Takawo had lain in a drug-deep slumber, and walked from hall to hall, the novice

chattering the while or keeping silent as the interest upon Takawo's face ebbed or flowed.

To all he said Takawo gave courteous heed, but his thought wandered. He wished again to behold the Pool and the ancient Man. As they passed through one spacious apartment this desire guided him and he leaned from a window, but the garden that met his eyes was not the same and here a white horse was cropping rare and cultivated springtime flowers.

The novice came and leaned beside Takawo and a look of solemn adoration lit his eyes:

"This is our Horse of Heaven who carries the messages of the pious up the Moon-Ladder to the sky. But do not gaze long at him else you will be blinded. This infirmity not even our High Priest may cure, for it is against the will of God."

They turned away and passed into another room filled with tables. Priests were seated there, whispering together. But no one glanced at Muto and the two went on, down a winding corridor through a heavy door and crossed through many rooms. Out again into a declining pathway under a stone roof so shadowed Takawo could see but faintly the boy who walked beside him. Suddenly the novice touched his sleeve and whispered:

"Be silent! Do you hear anything?"

Takawo stood still.

"No, only the breathing of ourselves."

"Within that room is buried one who had the heart of a beast. But it was not his sin, rather the sin of the lady whom he loved. She fell mad and would eat the flesh of little children."

"Do you fear him still?"

"There are times I think I hear him crying out his innocence. Then I run past as quickly as the hunted hare."

"But all this came to pass a long time ago."

"Who knows? There is an old man lives beneath the Temple who says that Time is a serpent with his tail ever in his mouth."

They passed on in silence, the while Takawo felt the trembling of the boy and was glad when they came at last to an open doorway that let out into a garden. The boy now lost the shadow of his thought; he pointed to the bamboo shoots that were visible above the ground.

"In other places the bamboo grows tall but here it remains close to earth as if fearful to reach up into this holy air."

Takawo did not answer but gazed at the scene beyond. A hedge bordered the far end of this enclosure; and beyond, the mountain descended gently to a rocky slope. Upon this stony ridge were many tombstones, broken and beautiful with time. Below this incline, rich with monument, the hill sped quickly down and at its base the village lay with the steam of the Sacred Pond opening like a blue fan across the air.

Upon all this Takawo gazed when there came to his ear the slow and faltering sound of an old man's step. He turned and saw again that priest who had carried away the green snakes upon his bamboo stick.

Takawo bowed, for this was a man of many years; his face withered, his hair white, his eyes illumined with a holy gleam.

The voice in which this venerable priest addressed Takawo was like the whispering of wind in the dry leaf:

"Honored Guest, your countenance is downcast. You are

young and therefore I bid you be of good cheer, for spring rises from the earth like a strong fragrance. The two snakes I caught upon my staff will live. Come and see the nature of their immortality."

He led young Muto from the garden down a narrow step and so into a cave built beneath the Temple. In the center of this place, suspended upon a post of exceeding age and strength, burned a little lamp, so pale, it seemed one of the further stars. In its faint ray Takawo could distinguish musical instruments of ancient condition and design. From one corner the old man took a ko-kyoo ornamented with the skin of snakes.

"Is it for this you caught the snakes this morning?"

"Yes, for this, and to save you a little from the fate that will overtake you because of your own nature."

Takawo glanced at the seer, then turned toward the instrument the priest held in his hands:

"I beg you play for me a little, for the voice of this instrument I have never heard."

The old man put the ko-kyoo on his lap and made a little tune sweet with remembrance and old age. Then he laid it aside and taking another, moved the low bench where he had been sitting to face the door which had been left open after their entrance.

"It is a long time since any one asked me to play. See, this is an even more ancient instrument. I made it when first I came here and that was half-a-hundred years ago. My whole life has passed me by in the shadow of Mysterious Heaven. In this cave I chose to dwell because it is near the earth and when I open my door and look out upon the tombstones on the hill, I see the living bring their dead; with passage of the years the dead melt into the

earth, and when flames mount from these barren stones, I know that souls have been released.

"As for me I live in this dark and secret place and few men know. Through my cave rises this post that is prop of the Temple. But I talk too long of myself! Speak to me of your journeyings; though you are young you have the eyes of wisdom!"

"For the present I am the flying seed blown by the wind. If ever that wind should settle, mayhap I shall drop to earth and there find soil to grow in."

"When your face was reflected in the pool I searched your fate. The wind upon which you ride will never rest; forever you are doomed to be carried by the secret mysteries of chance. Through this you may achieve nobility. Look from this open door; gaze at that distant oak that even now puts forth a few frail leaves. See how beautiful the proportion between the trunk and boughs. But there is hidden yet the most beautiful proportion of all: the symmetry of the root and stem. Long ago this temple stood upon this Mountain like a Holy Tree. Faith poured into it from the mourning multitudes. But an unhappy priest, one maddened by excess of love for a single being, cast an evil spell upon it. That has never passed; no, not even our august High Priest can throw it off. He, too, is slave to it; he grows weary under the duties that are dust within his mouth. But he endures for he has lost the love of living and it scarcely matters to him that he tolls out his days in the graveyard of others' sins."

The old man paused, turned upon Takawo a long and meditative glance, and then went on:

"Those who live in the Temple have forgotten the root; they have lost the perfect balance which Confucius loved.

You tell me you are the flying seed upon the wings of the wind; take this counsel to your heart. Maintain the perfect balance of root and stem and if you keep faith with this, return and let my eyes rest upon a perfect man. I beg you listen carefully to one who is without care for glory and sees before his eyes, the beautiful decay of bodies and the flickering of souls in candle flame. Go, and if you can achieve this beauty, return again though it be long after, for even from the grave so strange a sight shall surely open my death-dreaming eyes."

He ceased and once again picked up the ko-kyoo and played a little tune. So strangely illumined the silence that now shone within the cave a word might seem a shadow fallen on a sacred pool. The silence lasted until the old man rose, went from that place, leaving by an inner door which, closing after him, resounded with metallic clang as if upon its other side were endless corridors of stone.

Takawo listened, stood up, walked through the open door into the sunlight of the garden.

The novice with head of blue ran toward him, his sleeves fluttering like wings of a bird. His mouth was open with words for Takawo:

"They tell me you must dine with them. You are greatly honored."

They went together to a sheltered walk and so out to a wider space of garden from which three broad and carven steps went toward the Temple. Upon these steps three men wearing dresses of sunset color waited. The pillars that gleamed in the dying day were painted with crimson and with blue.

A thin wind rose, scented with the smell of pine, and this brought Takawo the memory of his castle-home,

where rich evergreens ever shadowed grated windows. He straightened and walked past the three strangers with a step as proud as his Father's and befitting the lineage of the Lords of Katsu-yama-jo. Some magic of the old man's counsel had fallen on him and he seemed to wear an august attire: a pilgrim sent to win perfection in this world. With so elegant a grace did he move forward, the three men glanced at him with shrewd side-long eyes and whispered when he passed.

The novice ran ahead, opened the carven door, and there was presented to Takawo, a hall rich in color and design; and spanning its length, a board of exceeding size. This was spread with food and drink; roasts of flesh, and bowls of greens, and services of silver.

The table was crowded with men, many in costume of the West, none in priest's garb, and all talking vivaciously. At their head was Mee-Hoo-Shy standing, a glass upraised.

Takawo entered. The High Priest observed him and beckoned him to his side where a chair was pushed back as if awaiting occupance.

Takawo walked toward the chair and when he stood beside his host, the High Priest spoke:

"This morning in our Temple I found this young man whom I loved, but now I present to you a man whom I respect."

The men about the board raised glasses to their lips and drank, fixing Takawo with curious eyes.

The High Priest went on: "And now, Shyo-Lin, go on! This young man is friendly to our cause. Though this, I cannot prove by fact I perceive it by the color of his spirit! Be free to talk as though he were of our fraternity!"

At the opposite end of the board a short man rose and rubbing his plump hands together, spoke in a voice of sly gentleness:

"As I was saying before our Captain did us the honor of presenting to us that rarity, a man whom he respects, I had reminded you that to-day is the birthday of the Clan of the Red Dragon. To celebrate it I determined to hunt that animal and to present it to you this night roasted in its own juice. This morning before the alarm-clock Sun had pushed me out of bed, I deceived him by rising while the moon yet shone and proceeded to give chase to that Dragon, Symbol of our Hope. I heard the monster braying in the distant woods. Indeed I have heard the western mule bray in the same fashion. But this Dragon was of nimble foot. He would not await his master. He glided over hills and valleys and always as I came near the sound of his prophetic voice, he was ever in the wood beyond. So until the rising of the sun, I hunted. At last I had to content myself with bringing home a boar!"

Laughter followed and the plump speaker went on:

"But from a boar we may learn much. His track is direct and straight. We have been too much like the mountain-goat, skipping wildly from right to left."

"The boar is direct, runs straight because he is stupid and his eyes are small." This interruption came from a young man sitting close to Takawo. This same young man went on:

"Come, Shyo-Lin, remember speech is precious when it comes in small grains. We have agreed on principles. We should not be here if we were not of accord. Rather let us discuss methods. Come tell us who was the beautiful pilgrim whom you cured to-day?"

The plump young man sat down suddenly, picked up his glass, and smiled:

"If you won't let me make my speech I'll not tell my secrets."

"Tell her name!"

The shout was general.

"It is fitting that I know." The High Priest made a face of mock authority and the plump young man raised up his eyes.

"This is no laughing matter. Great developments may come of her pilgrimage. She is the wife of the Governor of Tai-Foo-Choo."

A silence fell on the assembled men. The plump speaker rose again. All mockery was gone from him:

"This Lady Liang is not only of exceeding beauty but of excessive wealth even in her own right. Moreover she has a brother who was student in Europe and America. She has intelligence, sympathy; in short, she came not to be cured of illness but of unhappiness. Her Lord will have no communication with her if she see her brother and to him she is devotedly attached. Indeed her husband wearies her. This means there will come a time . . ."

The High Priest rose, spoke in quick sharp tones:

"If she be a woman of intelligence let her choose for herself. Tell her sincerely of our cause and of the necessity for loyalty. Be done with rituals which the superstitious demand. But if you be swayed by her beauty into thinking her intelligent it is proof your own wit is lacking!"

"To prove her wit, Kin-Loo, I shall tell you the pretext by which she came."

"That is not essential. Come, let us eat!"

The plump young man subsided. There was more

laughter, general now and at its ease. The repast began. Each young man, and indeed they were without exception young, helped serve if the need arose. The talk was of the West; of travels here and there; books read in all languages of the world; of new students returning from universities abroad. A whirling conversation of hope, ambition, faith, sacrifice, and youth. The High Priest presided like a father; his face serene, a little weary, indulgent of their talk.

Mingled with their fervent discussion of New China to which they all declared they would gladly give their lives, was the ancient theme of rituals, of gesturing made to satisfy the pious, of deceits demanded by the superstitious; of men too old for amorous expedition; of men diseased through passion; of women sick for lack of it.

Takawo listened, understanding a little what the old man meant when he had said: "they have forgotten the root." Indeed it seemed to Muto, through practicing deception by means of ritual, in time these men might become infected with the deception which they practiced and so unfit themselves for leaders of an awakened nation. Though Takawo smiled a little, knowing he was not of the nature to understand the compromises of this world, nevertheless he found the talk a little hurtful to his expectation that Mee-Hoo-Shy might be a man of the most holy spirit, one who tolerated none but the most pure and honest action. So brooding he sat dazed, listening to the talk as one might hear the beat of rain upon a roof, frightened by the storm, and desolate.

The voice of Mee-Hoo-Shy stemmed this brooding.

"To-night in the trial court you will discuss the subject of Civic Virtue. All men know that virtue has two faces:

the temporal and the eternal. Those firm stones that last forever are so deep-rooted in our philosophy we shall not discuss them here; but the virtues of the citizen change from age to age. I shall leave this company to decide what a 'good man' may be in the happy future of our awakened country. Meanwhile I shall walk with this young traveler so he may tell me of his native land and perhaps I shall learn from him what virtue is, clothed in different costume and spoken in another tongue."

Mee-Hoo-Shy rose from the table; Takawo followed, and they left the hall amidst the bowing of the gathered men.

In the corridor they entered there was darkness and Takawo felt rather than saw the tall and august figure of the High Priest pacing near. It was only when a strange and melancholy sound came from below their feet that Mee-Hoo spoke:

"When I came to this Temple I saw nothing but neglected nature and deserted gods. Both repelled me; but it was my fate to be chosen for a saviour by the people of this hamlet. I stayed. This corridor I trod thinking thoughts of the world that I had left, and always this sound from earth did follow me. It seemed my own youth calling me to return into the sun again. But there are hours that mark our death though our body go on living. When the Lady Lee did die, then I knew all springtime, summer, sunlight, was gone from me and this breathing self was but a shade."

"The Lady Lee? The Lady Lee-Kwan-Tien has gone?" the words were whispered in the gloom.

"I shall hide the truth from you no longer, for you have dealt sincerely with me. Secret messengers have brought me word the Lady Lee is dead. She died in bringing forth a child."

"Then you still live in this world though you remain hidden in this Temple of mystery and death!"

"Be plain! Your words fly before me like a wind. Is there some matter I do not know?"

Takawo paced forward, hastening his step. So bursting was his heart, the words were parched upon his tongue. Before him at a little distance lay a vast petal of moonlight and hoping this might indicate some exit he kept silence till they had reached the illumined place and there indeed a door stood open, and the garden dreamed beneath the moon.

Takawo spoke:

"Kin-Loo, for by this name the Lady Lee did call you, I behold in us two men who are bound together by a common sorrow. I think there is a tale that I may tell you and if you wish, you in turn may impart to me what is in your heart."

They went together out into the cool sweet night. The stars seemed low and of exceeding size. In the valley shone lights as if the constellations had wandered there, scarce heeding the division of the air and earth.

"Perhaps if we sit where we can look down upon the valley and the shadows of the pine, I can speak to you more easily and having done so, I shall have fulfilled my quest in seeking you. But how strange is this my fate that I, who in the dark region of my heart have wished you dead, now learn that she who was the Mistress of my Wandering, is herself passed from among the living."

Mee-Hoo-Shy said no word but turned to Takawo so profound a look of pain and desolation the young man scarce could keep his voice lashed to the pattern of his thought. At last, fastening his eyes upon a distant star, he began:

"One autumn evening in the Hareem of General Ko in the City of Chio Foo when chance had left us together and alone, Lee-Kwan-Tien confessed to me: 'In this house which I am never permitted to leave I am aware neither of the passing of the days nor of the months and only by knots upon a cord am I able to tell how near I am come to the time of my child's birth. This silk which is of scarlet and of gold I have torn from the belt which the wife of General Ko did give me. At night when every one is asleep I come here to this room and looking from this window I think I see beyond the trees, the garden, and the moon, the mountains of my own home. So dreaming, I tie a knot in the silk and bless it for my child's sake. When my hour comes I shall wind this cord about my waist and it will give me courage, for I shall recall every brave thought and every strong desire that has gone into the tying of the cord. Who knows but my child may be a son and like his father and bring me to Shanshi again?' "

For many moments, Mee-Hoo-Shy was locked in silence and then his voice came, distorted and made dry by hidden sobs:

" 'Like his father?' She spoke thus?"

"She spoke thus and this the cord she gave me. This first knot of all she tied for that night which she told me she would remember always. It was the night of the battle of Biak-dan in your native village."

Reverently Mee-Hoo-Shy took the cord; the threads of gold and scarlet caught the moonlight so it was illumined in

his hand. Then he turned aside his face. When next he spoke his voice was strangely muted; and stole, a sigh upon the air.

"You open old wounds and pour salt in. The child is mine and living?"

"The child is yours, but if he lives or not, that I cannot tell. Of you, the Lady Lee had little word. She spoke to me that night, saying secret messages brought her from Shanshi told you had been killed; still others that you had deserted the army and become a bandit. She added always: 'For our love's sake, I pray that he still lives.' "

With a muffled cry Mee-Hoo rose and began pacing the circuit of the garden; when he began again his voice was bitter as the hail.

"The sinister smile Fate turns upon me! These young men in our Temple play the part of priest but all are ardent workers for the New China. They bend ritual to their use while they prepare the soil for happier times; and most of all, they regard General Ko as the leader of our cause upon the field of battle. How then can I turn against him? I know too well the usages of custom that a child born in his Hareem must be brought up as his own. Clearly do I see all this and yet—Buddha help me to accept my fate!"

He stopped before Takawo and bending forward, spoke with brutal haste:

"I was young. I was enamored of the principles of justice dictated by leaders of our Revolution. I joined the Army of the General. My heart was torn, for I was compelled to leave her whom since my childhood I have loved. Though doomed to fight my brothers and my friends, I persisted, for I was drunk with the vision of a New China.

That night which was the consummation of our love—that most beautiful and dreadful night—marked my true death. I would give up all honor had I saved her then! You know the events of that evening. You do not know that I returned two days later when I was able to escape from my own lines. Lee was gone! Then I learned she had been taken to General Ko's Hareem.

"I joined the bandits; I, too, was a Brother in the Eternal Pine. But soon they called me traitor and they sent me forth. In the Village of Bei-Chio I found shelter in the house of a carpenter and his young wife, but there I dared not linger, fearing to bring harm upon them. I wandered on and came to this pilgrims' hamlet. Here fate made me the symbol of hope for a disconsolate people. I stayed. They raised me to a god and I became lonely as a god, oppressed by the worship which they rendered me. I called to my side young men hunted by the forces of reaction. They came, glad of shelter, finding in this Temple freedom to speak out their thoughts, but compelled through custom and fear to perform the ancient ritual. Thus live my friends who are, in a sense, my sons. I am grown old of heart. They hope for candid days when they may be sincere and let all men know them as they are. Meanwhile we are weighted with the past; we gesture the pious gestures. The faithful are pleased; the Temple and the village flourish. Our coffers bulge; but I become impatient for the day when we can use our gold for the release of an awakened nation."

There was a pause. At last Takawo let fall gently from his lips:

"But meanwhile your child grows up in the shadow of the man you hate?"

Kin-Loo walked a little way apart and then returned. His voice was strangely muted when he spoke, as if he dared not use it in its strength:

"No, strangely I cannot hate him. That has passed. There were hours when his blood warm upon my hands might have seemed the keenest ecstasy. But to bring a child to this House of Mystery, this graveyard of others' sins, were the saddest lot of all. Until our New Day is come, I shall be hunted if I leave this place. The leaders of reaction seek my head and I was deserter from the Army of our Revolution. With General Ko, my child will have the tender care of women until he be old enough so I can reveal myself. For the present my heart is gone from me and I think it were an ill for a child to be near one who is out of love with living."

Again Kin-Loo paced the garden but after some moments he returned and stood before Takawo:

"Yes, you are indeed he who has trod upon my shadow but now I must bid you farewell for I see in you a pilgrim who seeks to realize Beauty in this world. Your eyes are veiled. If you wish happiness, pray they may stay so. But if you would come to that innermost stillness of the serene mind, ask that all my be taken from you.

"Parents, children, love: these are but the illusion we live with others in this life. We live alone and the wind of exile blows ever on our heads. All this has been in my heart to say but I have kept my silence. To-day when I heard you speak to that Goddess of Yo within our Temple I knew you were such a spirit as might understand my thought. You penetrated the semblance of evil. The holy eye may see distortion and behold divinity. Centuries of sin have built this Temple; but this is symbol of what men do ever

in the spirit. When I came here upon this mountain I thought to destroy these gods. But I have learned. Between living men stand phantoms of the past; and we are pigmies beside the stalwart giants of our lusts. Make these giants into images of stone and wood, regard them with unfearing eyes. Worship their power; let pour their power into us, for all is good and serves the ultimate end.

"Friend and brother, for we speak the self-same tongue, I give you blessing. I shall have my novice lay out for you the dress of wandering poet-priest. Wear this and it will bring you food and shelter. Continue your pilgrimage. Seek the horizon of your hope. Lose all; gain all, for the flower blossoms when the calyx falls."

So saying he laid upon Takawo, a hand silvered with moonlight, walked from the garden and was lost in the shadow of Mysterious Heaven.

Takawo remained; he scarcely seemed to breathe. At last a small bird of night cried in the distant slope. The wind was chill. He rose and reëntered the Temple. In the corridor a novice awaited him and with muffled step led him to the Room of Hospitality where was laid out a robe of black, a necklace of sea-shell, and a tall staff bearing upon it silver bells tied with scarlet cords.

In these he dressed and bidding the novice lead the way Takawo went from the Temple under that great bell which hummed faintly even as he passed.

In moonlight and his heart made beautiful with grief, Takawo went down the Sacred Slope of Shan.

THE HOUSE OF PLUM

Twilight in Bombay, City of India, Land of the beloved Buddha; prayer droning in Buddhist Temples; prayer whispered in Christian Churches. An arched temple window lit by candles of the faithful; electric stars festooning stone monuments to Mammon. Flap of sea-gulls' wings in the dreaming sky; sound of a shot reverberating along the immense cymbal of the air. Christian Church-bells ring.

The Arabian Sea swirls about the Island and with its opalescent waters bathes this port of the East that gazes ever toward the West.

Almost two years have passed since Takawo Muto left the Temple of Mysterious Heaven and in the dress of poet-priest wandered, patterning his pilgrimage to the words of the Sage upon the Sacred Mount of Tai: "Go ever to the West and your life may bring you wisdom."

Only a week ago in Janjiru a tavern-keeper told Takawo that in Bombay he should seek "The House of Plum for there a fellow country-man of yours does dwell."

So now down a twilight-tender street Takawo wends his way seeking this House of Plum. He finds it at last and rings the bell upon his staff and then intones a chant.

A little whispering pause follows the music of his greeting and then slowly the door opens and the face of a man worn with years looks out at him. When the old man beholds Takawo wonder spreads a color in his cheeks.

"Ah, then, you come in answer to my prayer? Only now did I pray, remembering the death of my wife. So long it is since I have heard a chant in my own tongue. I am ashamed to offer so poor a resting place but I beg you enter. I have heard the greatest priest cares not on what soil his feet may tread and the saintliest man may enter anywhere."

As he speaks he opens the door to its full width.

"I shall enter gladly, Reverend Host, but I must tell you the chants I make are my own and I am no priest as many persons on my travels have considered me. If you are still willing that I enter, knowing this truth, then I shall come in gladly."

"I did not welcome you because I thought you a holy man, but because you chant in my own tongue and you are young. I see many young men in my house, but they come at eventide and with one desire. They leave with sorrow and have not the eyes of purity. I beg you share my tea!"

The old man leads the way up a stair, thence along an outdoor balcony that faces the harbor; and so through a small dressing-room into a living-apartment where a family shrine burns in one corner.

The old man goes toward this and faces Takawo, speaking in a hushed and cautious voice:

"This morning I opened this shrine, for it is five years ago to-day my wife died, and seldom do I open it, fearing her spirit may not be happy in my house. But to-day I thought I might do so. Perhaps you will help me with a prayer and blessing?"

The old man lights incense and as the smoke rises, Takawo reads through the pungent mist the inscription on the shrine: "Blossom of the Plum." Takawo looks at his host and sees tears making dim the venerable eyes.

"Forgive me, Honored Guest, that dew obscures my sight, but when I look at you I think of my own son. Better, perhaps, he died in youth and does not see his father thus exiled from his native land and longing to lay his bones down to rest in the ancestral soil. So many years I have shut myself in this room, without the love of children or without a friend. Many of my countrymen come here, but they never speak long with me. Perhaps even those girls who live under my roof care little for me. Perhaps if you have no need of hastening forward in your journey you might stay with me a while so from your lips I may recall my native land and fill my heart with peace before I die."

"If one may bring peace who seeks that rarity himself, then I shall gladly stay," Takawo smiles at his venerable host.

Suddenly the old man turns, his face flushed as if he has spoken more than had been his plan and with a step made slow by age, he leaves the room and after some little space of time, there comes to Takawo's nostrils odors of food native to his land of birth: ginger-bread and preserved sea-weed, mushrooms dried, and sweetened fish. These steal out to him, evoking memories of festive days in the castle of his ancestral isle. At last the Master of the House of Plum enters, carrying a tray, on which is rice with preserved sea-weed laid thereon, and tea.

"For these I have longed many months. You have guessed the secret of my heart."

"If you are from the South of Nippon then you delight in sea-weed. I have this brought to me by sailors."

"I come not from the South but from a place where at evening in the winters the snow is no more than a fine dust as if fallen from the stars. So thin that snow and shining, so delicate that in the morning with the sun it vanishes. Never can I forget the winters of my native isle. There was a bell upon our tower and in the time of snow it seemed to sound more purely. Then our voices seemed more clear; and when I stood upon the tower and looked at the fields below and at the village and saw the peasants at their work I thought I heard them breathe, for life is more intense in winter than at any other season."

"I, too, have longed for winter. Here I rest and dream. This ceaseless warmth brings no climax to my days. I exist as in a stupor and only in longing and recollection do I live. But perhaps it is old age that does all this."

"No, I do not think so. Perhaps the cause is not the ceaseless warmth but rather residence in a town which is like a burning stone. I have traveled in the interior of India and have seen men and women worshiping. Their masters have taken from them the statues of their gods, but still they bow down to broken pedestals. Surely there was intensity of feeling there. It is rather the town shut out from nature and men imprisoned, that gives this sense of desolation. Yesterday when I thought to come here I welcomed the nearness of a city, for I had not seen one for many months, but this morning when I trod the streets and saw no green, no tree, I wished to turn away again. Had it not been for you, and the welcome that you gave, I should be desolate, alone."

The old man offers Takawo a bowl of tea:

"You who are so young, speak so? This is strange, for when I first beheld you, I thought in you I should find peace and hope."

"I think that hope may well be dispensed with in the cup of peace."

For many moments the venerable man looks at Takawo in silence, then goes on:

"I think you speak so rather to teach yourself humility than from true resignation."

Takawo caresses the bowl within his hand and is about to make some comment pertaining to it as is the custom of his native land, when the door opens slowly and a girl walks in. She is slender and is dressed carelessly as if she had but risen from her bed. Her hair streams over one shoulder and her arms hang down as do the arms of Javanese puppets. Her face is pale and lifeless. She turns her eyes upon Takawo and regards him without interest.

"Suzuka, has anything unusual happened?"

She fastens her eyes upon the Master of the House and when she speaks her voice is monotonous and low:

"Oyaji-san, nothing unusual but I never learn. Did you see that man who came about midnight? I thought you were awake; your door was open. When I saw him I thought him an outcaste and he'd come to me, I being the only person he could speak to. I played with him the game of love, but I became entangled. When I woke this morning he was gone. Not even Jirokichi at our door had seen him go. He's taken all my treasure. Did you see any one leave the house at an early hour?"

"No, I did not watch the door this morning for I was busy with my prayers. To-day I paid no heed to any one until I heard the chant of this young man. Speak to him,

Suzuka, for you are come from the same native soil."

The girl looks at Takawo with heavy, lifeless eyes but no word issues from her lip.

"Do you not remember a little of your childhood?" the old man persists.

The girl still makes no sound. Takawo breaks the silence:

"It's indeed a misfortune that happened to you last night."

Suzuka smiles a wry, small smile and faint flame flickers in her eyes.

"Who knows? I cannot often have a night like that. I paid for it, what matter? Treasure can easily flow back again."

She shifts her glance to the old man:

"I'll go light the lamp before my Beckoning Cat. She always brings me luck."

With listless step and the same curious wooden movements of her body, she leaves the room.

The Master of the House of Plum looks after her, then in a whisper to Takawo:

"If I could but see her heart! She is like the eel! Yet once I had high hopes for her...."

"Tell me her story, for I have never seen that look in the eyes of a woman. She is like the sound of water under a thin coat of ice."

"Yes, I will tell you of her life, but first of all I must tell you of mine, for what she is, is something of my responsibility."

He stops to pour more tea and offers the second bowl to Takawo. Placing his own upon the tray and gazing at

his guest with a glance in which shyness and candor mingle, he begins:

"When my wife died and she was beautiful—ah, well, all men think dead wives beautiful—but her spirit was as lovely as her face. I must go on: when Umeko came to die she asked me not to part with the girls who even then lived under my roof."

"Lived under your roof?"

"Aye, even then for, Kirosuke, a man of Mishyu had died and had left his property to me in payment for a debt. These girls were his possession, for he had kept a Flower-Willow House. I took them into my home and there my wife treated them as if they were her children, saying they were come from the same native soil, were of the same blood and, like ourselves, were exiles in a foreign land. Before she died she begged me promise her I should not sell them again or give them away or let them go except they be returned home.

"Then she died. As time passed the girls forgot my wife and all her kindness. They began to laugh, to deck themselves. I became so angry I would have turned them out had it not been for the promise I had made my wife.

"Being bored, the girls became troublesome and having no skill in anything but passion they could do no work. As the days passed I found I was unable to feed and care for them, for I have never been a man of wealth. They desired new clothes and trinkets and they chided me for giving them so little. Being away from men they began to gamble among themselves who should win me first. They made bold advances. I had made a vow of faith to my wife, for she had been my great love. As time passed I became desperate and at night I walked upon the streets, not

daring to go home, fearing the girls and yet longing for their company.

"Soon they learned that I avoided them and when I was gone they invited customers. These men would steal away before I came home and as the pious man is led to the house of evil by a rope tied to his ox, so without intending it, I became Master of a Flower-Willow House."

In the little pause which follows Takawo thinks to put a word but presently the old man goes on, quickly, as if he would have full confession made before he permits his guest to speak:

"A strange fate to fall upon me. Now you may understand why seldom I dare open my wife's shrine. And yet? It was her promise caused me to let the girls stay, and if I feel the weight of evil it is rather because I was not clever enough to win much treasure that I might buy these girls all their hearts desire, and so save them from this trade. Yet I think a life without men might be wearisome to them. True, I might have bought them husbands had I gone to a strange city and been a man of wealth. But I accept my fate. I beg them to save their money, not to spend all on trifles, so when they are old they may return to their native land again. They are of the same blood as ourselves and many were stolen from their homes in early childhood. But I think to grow old and still be exiled is no happy issue for a life."

"To be young and to be exiled may also have its pain." Takawo glances away from his host as the words fall from his lips.

The old man does not heed this interruption but continues as if pleading with himself:

"Then, too, I have a sincere affection for my girls.

Once or twice a girl has gone away never to return. Later I learned she had left my house because she had become diseased and would give no malady to others of our family. Then, too, these girls are proud and wish to remain beautiful and young in the memory of their sisters.

"As for myself, I can but wait the end of all my days. But if you, my guest, would do me the honor to impart to me the joy of your company, stay and speak to me of our native land, telling me all your memory holds most dear. Thus it may be I shall the more willingly slide down the slope of eternal peace."

"If you will accept as your guest one who is without peace in his own heart and is a wandering pilgrim in this world, I shall gladly stay."

The old man rises and stands gazing at Takawo, then turning almost with the gesture of a child, goes on:

"I beg you pardon me, my Honored Guest, but the trampling feet of night fast approach my house and I must leave you. If you wish the company of the ladies, I shall call them, for they will be flattered to please you; if you desire the silent pleasures of a game of chess, I shall gladly wait upon you. If sleep be your secret wish, I shall spread your futon in my little room."

Takawo rises too:

"Not to dream but to listen to the distant music of the sea, I shall retire to that place which you, my Honored Host, have offered me. I thank you for your courtesy and on the morrow I shall greet you with reawakened friendliness."

Takawo Muto walks from the room and as he passes through the hall the titter of feminine laughter comes to his ears and a strange wind blows upon his heart.

His dressing-room is open to the bay and it is loud with sound of waves. A storm has risen. He closes the screen and the music of the waters is muted to a distant murmur. He undresses, finds upon the floor a futon spread with rich coverlets of silk, lies down. More weary than he guessed, he cannot fend off the seduction of slumber and of dreams.

Through his sleep stalks nightmare-creatures of many tongues, of many mouths, laughing hideous laughter. Trees are laden with women's heads bending low towards the ground. Horses go by, riderless, and tear the heads from off the boughs. Glass is shattered; hair entwines between the horses' feet; they tumble upon green grass and shriek with agony, for the hair becomes as serpents embracing them with death.

Men's voices cry aloud; patter of feet over his head, past his door; a burning ship looming in the darkness; a cup filled with blood; the blood blossoms with a million flowers, crystal clear and pure.

A pale dawn at last, with the sky all empty and no cloud but a golden sea-horse mounting on its tail. Over the dark bay, a vast white gleaming, the supernal fleece torn from the nest of heavenly birds.

Takawo stands gazing from his window; sees life come to that outspread world of water and of men. Vague ships press from out the distant mists; sleepy boats stir near quays; men cry hoarsely. A woman screams somewhere. Silence. Shattering of glass. Quick steps. Then eerie stillness with the dawn pouring its pure silver on the City of Bombay.

The day passes with food offered to him upon a tray and a message brought by the stalwart door-keeper that the master of the House of Plum is none too well and will deny himself the pleasure of his guest's presence until the hour of sunset when they will meet upon the balcony.

The hours slip away, all objects wavering like sea-flowers under Takawo's eyes for the night have weighted him. He is passion-ridden and feels within his own flesh the torment of a sensual greed. He puts upon his body the poet's garb and sits watching the moving horizon of distant waters. Ships go out to that inscrutable rim of the world and slip away. Takawo, too, longs to follow them and yet . . .

Morning, noon: these drop away into the profound depths of the past, and sunset is come.

A murmur of female voices rises from the balcony. The master of the House of Plum knocks upon young Muto's door. Takawo gives one parting glance into the mirror. The sorrowful proud face of his Father seems to look out at him.

He follows the invitation of his host and goes upon the balcony. The girls sit apart, and their pale-gold arms rise and fall as they comb their long cascades of hair. He sees how the little half-moons of their brows are raised when the skin of the forehead is pulled up in the rhythm of the comb. Three girls stand arranging the hair of their sisters. Shoulders are bare and gleaming in the calyxes of scarlet, green, and purple silk kimonas.

Their breasts round and smooth as fruit ripened under the moon slumber in the secrecy of their kimonas. Their pale knees are bare and the tips of embroidered shoes softly agitate the hems of their rich garments.

Takawo gazes long at a delicate figure in kimona of palest yellow. This girl sits apart, silent as if alone, and would seem the small cherished statue of a divine lady but that the slow rhythm of her breath, lifting the profiled contour of her breasts, tells she is human and alive.

Only through the prick of courtesy does Takawo force himself to take his eyes from her and attend the words of his host:

"When the gold touches the dark blue of this water, I am reminded of the bamboo stirred by the wind."

The Master of the House of Plum offers Takawo a mat, then folds his dress about him and lights a kiseru.

"You speak truly, Honored Host! Strangely, though the two are not alike, this scene brings to memory the harbor of my ancestral isle."

As Takawo speaks he glances toward that girl in kimona of yellow. She sits as before and does not turn her face. Stung by her indifference, he continues:

"It was from the bell-tower of my home I was able to watch the traveling ships seek the refuge of our sheltered bay."

"Aye, my friend, were there steamboats or funés in your time? I am grown so old I lose all sense of years."

"In my time there were boats driven by steam bringing to our island tourists who came to visit the shrines of the Enoki-Tree and of the Fox with Eight Tails, but I have heard my Grandfather speak of the funé-ships. Indeed, if you will bear with me, I shall recite a poem made by him."

Oyaji-san takes from his mouth the kiseru. His eyes kindle. The young man begins, letting his voice fall into the cadence of a chant:

"Then in the olden time
The funé-ships came sailing;
Sailors loved our mountain
And our fields
And here remained,
Awaiting the Fair Wind
That would blow them to the seas again;
They loved, they hated;
They made songs and were sad.
They lived the life of our people,
And became one with our island;
Now the men of the Steel Ships
Stay but a night
And in the morning
Disappear with the mist;
They wait not for the White Wind
Nor the Procession of the Moon;
They come and are gone;
They are the flitting sea-ghosts
Leaving not even memories behind."

For many moments the old man is silent, then he puffs at his pipe; at last his lips open:

"Ah, I remember well how as a young man I rowed in an ancient funé. Upon its great sail was the family crest of our Lord. As we sang and rowed, we felt we belonged to the sea and to the sky."

"Gentle Host, who knows but this same sentiment is hidden in the hearts of the dark-skinned Hindoos who in this harbor row laden boats?"

"This may be, but those men are not of my blood. Old age puts a longing in my heart and I cannot rest in peace

in other lands than mine. But tell me, was your Grandfather a poet?"

"It was said of him that wherever he looked, poems grew; however, his profession had been military and therein an exception to our lineage. My ancestors were men of peace."

"Men of peace! There are none such!" A girl in kimona of blue and scarlet ceases the combing of her sister's hair and faces Takawo with flashing eyes.

"Men bring no peace to women! Only in dreams do they give happiness. But since this young man made a song for us, you shall hear one of ours!"

She goes toward that girl whose face has been concealed and touches the pale yellow silk of her kimona. The girl turns round and Takawo beholds a face of exceeding delicacy and wistfulness. In a strange bewilderment her eyes scan the faces of her sisters. Takawo is reminded of the look of a child that has been roused from sleep. At last her eyes fall upon himself. She smiles a smile that is curiously mechanical. She folds her hands with a gesture of piteous patience, and in a voice thrilling to Takawo, for it is rich with unawakened passion, sings:

"Ah, do not pity us
Though our ships be small,
For we bring wine and rice
To Ports of Happiness.

The black hair of the maiden
Lies upon the pillow of embroidery:
She is the river
Shattered in the waterfall;

Her lover is neither willow
Nor the whitening moon;
He is the pine, as harsh
As its needles and its cones.

So let shut our eyes
And dream of gold,
For under dreaming lids
The pine becomes as tender
As the willow.

It is for gold and not for love
Our hair flows down
Across the pillow of delicate embroidery."

She ends her song; a sigh alight upon her lips. Then she raises her eyes to Takawo and the corners of her mouth curl in a smile. To Takawo it seems this sigh, this smile, are gestures of her spirit which though young is ancient in its patience and its wisdom. He finds her beautiful and observing her with sidelong glances, addresses the old man:

"This gracious girl whose name I do not know sings with so rare an art she wakens in me memories tender, haunting. While I listened to her, my eyes beheld the changing colors of the sky and I saw the candid light of day merge into the subtle hues of sunset. When this rose-pink radiance suffuses all the earth I am reminded of those days during the Festival of the Cherry when with my Grandfather I went to ring the sunset bell. Under the cherry trees whose laden boughs sent a swooning sweetness even to the summit of our mountain, were spread red

blankets and there the peasants sat at love and wine. Above them on the blossoming branches they hung tanjaku-scrolls on which were written thoughts of spring and longing. So with the approach of evening a hundred poems turned in the breeze; a hundred poems and a million leaves and flowers.

"Through the mists of twilight when a radiance tender as this which now creeps across the sky did touch the island that was my home, the peasants, drunken with wine, veered like sea-gulls, the petals falling on them from the boughs. Those strewn flowers seemed then to me the snow of spring, a supernal blessing from the sky. My Grandfather who was great with years said these petals fallen on the shoulders of his people were little hands placed there, begging them to linger a while longer under the trees, bidding them enjoy a few hours more their brief and frail beauty, for he saw in the Festival of the Cherry a tribute to the shortness of life."

"A man such as your august Grandfather would I gladly know! Wisdom was in him and exceeding strength; but as for me, I am afraid. Even this smoke that rises from the houses of this city fills me with distrust. Yet in the morning hope returns to me and for a brief hour I imagine I am young and strong."

"My Grandfather spoke often in this wise: 'The smoke of morning is vigorous and hopeful as the man who rises from his sleep; but the smoke of evening is stealthy and slow and hangs long in the air like the evil spirits that roam our island when dark falls. When the sun is in the West even the shadow of our mountain grows long and mysterious and I feel at this time that YO is close upon us, moving softly, strangely, and with hidden

dangers. It may be that the West remains always a mystery to us, for Toyo is our home and sunrise is our land. To the West is Seiyo where all unknown things are born. It is there the sun dies and perhaps that is why the evening smoke fills us with disquietude.'"

"Your Grandfather spoke truly. I, too, fear the West and when I see the great boats leave for the western world I feel closer to my end than at any other time. Perhaps it is because I am too old to welcome change and from the West come thoughts imperiling such as me and this my world and life. There memory is killed and action is the god."

"Men may be poisoned with recollection and love be bounded by the limits of our native land. My Father who loved the West was of another mind than my Honored Grandfather, saying affection for our island, its soil rich with our beloved dead, might become a chain binding our spirit. His love was the far-flying eagle whose wing knows the austere solitudes of the adventurous soul; my Grandfather's affection was the homing pigeon to whom no place but his native island and his own house could render peace."

"Peace? It is the spirit of youth that finds peace in far horizons. When you gaze upon this harbor I see your eye kindling with a purpose to be gone; and I fear these precious hours will be taken from me, when through your speech I live again my youth. But to all things I must be resigned. Now the night falls and my house is filled with games of passion. I stop my ears so what comes to pass will be but sounds heard on the other side of death. Come with me. A game of chess before our evening meal and then, mayhap, I shall be given the opiate of sleep."

Oyaji-san rises. The evening wraps the old man in a

shroud of gray so he becomes a symbol of man's piteous patience. Takawo follows, but at the door he stops to gaze back at the girls. In their mirrors their faces are reflected; with arms upraised they adorn their shining hair with metal flowers, with pins and combs. Only the girl who sang gives to the young man the candor of her eyes. She lifts her tender child-lips in a little smile; her mirror is fallen to her lap. It is a tiny pool in which is sunk the radiance of the dying day.

Tawako sups with Oyaji-san and plays a game of chess. The Master of the House of Plum retires to his apartment; Takawo goes to his own room. For companion Takawo has the rising murmur of the bay. The air is warm, is still; a thousand odors enter through the casement, a thousand nuances of night.

Girls' chatter ends. They go down into the chasm of the house and they are lost. Now and then comes to him a sound, as of a bubble rising from subterranean depths: below him is lived a life to which he is an alien.

He stretches out upon his futon, but sleep may not be seduced to lie with him. Memories stalk: beasts bitten with regret; creatures skeleton-thin, a dry wind blowing through their bones. Their feet stamp ground that is desolate and gray.

Tenderness torn; dreams withered; hope, a leaf upon a twisted stem. The texture of his brain is hot, is burning. A dry fever of unrest gnaws his secret flesh.

Deliberately he tries to shut out thoughts of Lee, of Nadja, Kay. They will not go. The face of that girl who sang has evoked them all. The essence of their patience,

their wistfulness, was in her face, her folded hands. The strength, the urgency of his passion for them was echoed in her voice; the exile of his spirit in her smile!

Hers a face less beautiful than Lee's, and more the child's; her body less rich than Nadja's, for it seems purified with pain; no calm assurance as in Kay, for this girl bears in her eyes, upon her lips, within her hands, the pathos of the prisoned spirit. Ah, is she not a symbol of himself? As he observed her while she sang, tenderness drew a veil before his eyes. She did seem enchanted!

The night is suave and tender on her face. Her eyes are closed. She sleeps! Then the thought she may lay her body down for gold tears the darkness from the room. The place is withering under a bright hard light.

Fingers tap upon his door.

"Enter!"

Takawo's heart leaps with an absurd hope.

A girl enters bringing a little tray, a stone-kettle, and two cups. She seats herself upon the futon, arranges her kimona so her sinuous body is wrapt close, pours whisky, offers Takawo one cup, drinks, tilts her head, and speaks:

"You find entertainment as lean as the starved cat? Between customers I thought of you. Do you like western whisky? Some sailors cannot pay but they bring this. It is their gold, their god. Come, I am no phantom; my name is Kunié. Now drink! You make me feel I'm turning somersaults inside a flute!"

Takawo sits up and takes the cup and drinks.

"To turn somersaults inside a flute would be a fakir's trick!"

"That's what I say. You make me feel there's something strange in here! Drink some more and tell me you're glad I came!"

"That you came here puts upon me the necessity of welcoming you."

"Don't speak in mysteries. You sound like a Medicine-Man. There was one at our street-corner at home."

"Am I like him? What did he do that you remember?"

"I don't know. I didn't come here to make up stories. I came not only for myself but for my sisters as well. I'll speak low for the Master would pull me out if I stepped over your 'sacred threshold.' I don't see why he pays you so great honor. To listen to him you'd think you were as old as the Master and without sex. After all you're young! Is there none among us who can please you?"

"You please me and I find the companionship of your sisters charming. This message you may give to them."

"You make me dizzy. If they would only stop talking about you. You look at us, our hair, our arms, our knees but your eyes don't kindle. I'm sick of hearing about you. Oyaji-san says: 'You came here as a poet-priest and as such are sacred.' Fukué wonders if you're too poor. Not poorer than a sailor surely! Then always you tell stories of your home! That's the worst of all; my head aches and I feel I'm three days out at sea!"

"Perhaps I've made an error in speaking thus. You said something of a Medicine-Man near your home? Tell me where was your childhood spent?"

"You're as thick-headed as the Mud-Turtle. Why spoil my dream like that? I talk of going home? Where is it? Do you think I'd find anything but ashes and cold eyes if

I went back? Be still with your tales of mother and father and love of home!"

"Forgive me, it is because Oyaji-san asked me to speak with him of our native land I agreed to stay and tell freely my childhood memories. But I have been insensitive to what this may have done to you. Forgive me. . . ."

There was in Takawo's mind still more to say but suddenly the body of Kunié droops toward him. In his arms he catches her. Her head slopes down upon his lap; her throat arches toward him; her lids quiver, close. Her lips are scarlet, moist, a little open; the tip of the tongue is visible within. He leans down nearer; every nerve of his flesh drawing him to her. Limp she lies across his knee; his body bends, rests upon her body. Kunié smiles and her lids are lifted; bright, gleaming serpent eyes watch him stealthily.

Suddenly Takawo catches the glitter of her glance, straightens suddenly, sits erect and rigid.

With a little moaning sound Kunié draws in her breath; her shoulders circle; her breasts stand clear; her head slips down and is pressed against the floor. Suddenly her arms dart up like wings of a sea-bird; they encircle him, bind him close and closer. She seems convulsed. Takawo grasps her wrists, unwinds the clinging arms; lays her firmly on the futon. Gets to his knees; looks at the creature she has just become; her woman-body that had been magnet to his senses, repulsive now and loathsome; her lips that had sucked away his will, a bleeding wound.

He rises to his feet, turns sharply and leaves the room. Upon the balcony the air is warm, is tender. He finds the stair, descends, passes the stalwart door-guard who raises a sleepy eye and lets him pass.

In the street before the house, men are gathered. They greet Takawo with laughter and with jeers.

"So you too got caught? Well then tell us which to choose! They're sly, these little Nei-san!"

Quickly, like a creature hunted, Takawo turns and walks rapidly away. Over his shoulder he has caught sight of a lattice-window open to the street, lit with lanterns, decked with girls. When he wins the solace of the darkness, he begins to run. Houses gape, or so it seems—gape with immense and grinning mouths at him, the fool who runs away. All houses on that street, the same. As a boy Takawo longed to enter the lives of those who live behind shut doors. Now he does so: façades seem torn away; he sees men, girls, convulsed in passion. He speeds on.

When the sound of his feet is drowned in the deep music of water moving against a pier, he slackens to a walking pace: at last he stops.

Upon a parapet of stone he stands; a cool wind pressing his body. He knows its impact and feels cleansed. In the water, stars are sunken. He longs to stretch his hand, to cup one in his palm, to make reality of this distant world.

Lee, Nadja, Kay: distant like these stars and far. For one night he held Kay within his arms; as for the rest, moving shadows, reflections of the love, the life that might have been.

In that girl who had sung upon the balcony all tenderness seemed wrapt; all sweetness of all tears, all secrecy of smiles. Might he take her from that place where the very air must breathe infection? In her song she had accepted fate. Might she be won to ardent love of life? As for himself he has lived too long the life of exile. He turns about and

walks rapidly, retracing his steps toward the House of Plum.

The men are gone. The lattice-window flush with the street is still lit. One girl sits there alone. Takawo comes close. The girl's head droops as if from weariness but the sound of his footfall rouses her. She lifts up her face. With a pang Takawo sees this is she who had made the little song.

She smiles at him and reaches out a pipe, catching at his clothes through the open grating of the window.

Takawo goes to the door-keeper:

"Let her follow me."

The door-guard grins.

Presently as he mounts the stair toward the balcony, Takawo hears the light sound of her step. He finds the mats upon which he and Oyaji-san sat that afternoon. The girl is close, the soft whispering of her garment comes toward him.

"Here?" she says and her voice holds a little sigh.

"Here," he answers, and sits down.

She sits down. Through the darkness he imagines the caress of her smile.

He lies down and puts his head upon her knee:

"Thus it was I lay one night when a lady by the name of Nami-Ko told me her story and in this wise I shall recall that lovely night when I learned for the first time that yo is beautiful!"

She does not answer but touches his hair softly. With a curious mingling of delight and loathing he knows her fingers are expert in the art.

Deliberately he puts down thoughts that threaten his intent:

"When I asked Jirokichi to call you here, it was not in lust, but in loneliness. I heard you sing and found you beautiful."

He reaches up his hand and touches her cool cheek. She leans close and the scent of ja-kaw comes from hair and breasts. He lies in silence and thinks to his own self:

"Who am I that I know my own heart? And what may lust be, but to forget 'loneliness'?"

She says no word but there on her lips a little murmur trembles, tender, lovely.

"You are wise to answer nothing, Precious One. A silent woman is a gift, for in silence beauty grows. But I speak too far from the object of my heart. This night I ran from this house fearing I might take the cup of life here offered me. Having seen you and heard your voice I could not take one for which I had no true desire when in you I have found the summation of all tenderness."

He raises his arms and encircles her slim body. She leans against him, and in the darkness he can see the moon pallor of her face, but distinguish no expression. For him the tender weight of her body and the warmth and scent of her flesh are pledges that her spirit listens. He goes on:

"It was not long ago I stood upon the summit of Mount Tai and longed to behold the rocky way by which I had ascended that high eminence but when I turned my eyes to gaze down at the valley I could see nothing but the Golden Wind that comes out of the Gobi Desert and that bears with it sand that is like the 'flower-dust' of our native land. That whirling golden veil I found beautiful, yet it obscured everything. Now I ask myself if my life has not been like this: with the eyes of youth I have gazed and beheld all objects wrapped in 'flower-dust.' Not once have I seen life

face to face. Even love has passed me by, for between me and the women I found beautiful has passed this Golden Wind. Perhaps this was best, and yet I would hold love and warmth within my arms."

He raises himself a little, draws her head close to his own, and seeks to plumb the depths of her eyes. He feels them tender upon him. Her lips brush his lips, yet she makes no sound.

"Ah, you are wise, Nearest One, for in this language of lips and eyes there is more said than through the awkwardness of words. But bear with me, for this heart of mine has been silent many years and in you I find one to whom I desire to tell all things. To-night I wish to meet life clearly. When this afternoon I looked at you and heard you sing, I thought you leaned toward me from the other side of Paradise; I knew that once again before my eyes passed the Golden Wind. To-night I still find you beautiful, knowing and understanding all. I have thought of your life in this house. When I ran away to-night I feared I could not love one who laid her body down for gold. But I have passed this fear, knowing it is not more strange to give the body for the price of gold than give the spirit."

The girl utters a little sigh and moves closer to Takawo. He touches her hair and speaks again:

"I must tell you of myself, for I would be honest, if that be possible through the treachery of words. I have run away from my native land not to win freedom for my spirit but to escape imprisonment for my body. Because of my father's principles, he abetted revolution in Southern China, seeking to supply arms for the Army of Sun-Yat-sen. But munitions were captured on the high seas; our government was forced to punish some one, else be involved

with Britain. Sentence of imprisonment was given. Because my father was not well and could not endure that penalty, I offered myself as the one guilty of the political crime. Officials sympathetic to our course, soon permitted my escape. The result is this wanderer's life. If I return it will bring disaster to my family. While I live out this exile, happier days may come, and the principles my Father holds, prevail not only in my own land but in all countries underneath the sun. As for me, I cannot turn back my step. I must go on, but I do not wish to go alone. To-night as I stood close to the moving waters of the bay and saw the stars reflected there, I longed to reach out my hand and pluck one from its depths, to make real and living in my palm that distant gleaming of another world. To me you seemed that star; will you come with me . . . away . . .?"

He has drawn close to her, so his last words are a breath upon her cheek.

For many moments she remains so, near to him, and then her lips find his ear. To him her silence has seemed a song accompanying the music of his mind, so his heart leaps, for now he will know her answer.

Bending her head a little to one side, she whispers:

"You are kind, you take me when I sit alone. Without you, my night would have been profitless. Because you did not know my ears can hear no sound, I give you myself for double time."

Over Takawo a cold wind blows. Stillness descends; he feels himself lost; shipwrecked as on the shore of some forgotten star.

Oblivious is he, to the girl, the place. Only the stillness and the cold are real.

He smiles a little; then suddenly he remembers he has hands. The girl is touching them.

The chill that has surrounded him, pierces slowly. He wonders if it may be so death comes.

Then without warning an austere fury shakes him. He puts the girl upon the floor; the thud of her body tells he has laid her down cruelly.

He leaves the balcony, descends the stair of the house, goes out upon the street. The lattice-window where the girl awaited customers, is shut. He turns sharply from sight of it and penetrates the darkness.

He plunges on, driven by the tempest of his disillusion. An alien sound goes along with him. At last he knows it is laughter that shudders on his own lips.

He comes to that quay where he stood some hours before. There he sinks down; and finally he sleeps.

Before dawn men waken him: Malayans, Hindoos, Ceylonese preparing the ship *Eastern Moon* for a voyage to Cape Town and thence to the Brazilian coast.

Takawo joins the crew.

At sundown the *Eastern Moon* spreads her sails, gives herself to the surging waters and sails into the West.

"In Seiyo, all unknown things are born," Takawo's Grandfather has said.

"Grandfather believed that the West held yo but it was there my father nourished his spirit, finding food for freedom. May it not be the Home-Land of my spirit, also?" thinks Takawo. "To my ancestral Island I may not return

till I am old; but in the New World, what faith, what strength, what love may not await me?"

He lifts his head and smiles

A wind has risen, born at the far horizon; it speeds across the waters; it passes *The Eastern Moon;* and with a long low cry dies upon the land.

To Takawo the wind traveling in this sunset world is golden.

FINIS

THE AUTHORS

MARGARET SPERRY, who is responsible for the form and style of this tale, comes of a line of Scandinavian landowners and Episcopalian preachers. She was born in Chicago but her earliest recollections are of the ancestral farm in Sweden. Her parents brought her back to the United States when she was three. They lived first in Brooklyn, New York, where she attended the grade schools, and then in Muskegon, Michigan, where she received her high school diploma. She entered the University of Wisconsin during the War and graduated from there shortly after it was over. Her election during her junior year to Phi Beta Kappa does not appear to have hurt her. After graduation she hurried, like all the ambitious young women of her generation, to New York and a career. She has sold Bibles. She did research on "Peace" for a business man. She has been a research secretary for an industrial commission, and ghosted for a retired rubber merchant. Also she has been a reporter. For a time she conducted a signed column on the *Brooklyn Sunday Eagle*. Writing was a passion with her which nothing could subdue. In her school days she perpetrated a lot of poetry and published some of it, and her life since has been torn between an appetite for putting down stories on paper and the necessity of eating at least one meal a day. About three years ago she found she just had to satisfy that appetite. She withdrew to Woodstock, New York, where it is done, to write.

It is there she met Takashi Ohta, whose spirit and memories provide the material of *The Golden Wind*. Mr. Ohta is scenic director of the Woodstock Playhouse and is by vocation a theatrical designer and painter. The eldest son of a Japanese noble, he grew up on the island of Gogo, in the ancestral castle which had been the hold of the Ohta family for more than eight generations. His father, Sumiwo Ohta, was one of the pioneers of the liberal and democratic movement in Japan; in his day, consequently the ancient home was a way-station for Japanese liberals fleeing from persecution. Takashi Ohta lived his first fifteen years in daily contact with such refugees. In his sixteenth year, his father apprenticed him for twelve months to a cloth merchant in Osaka "so that he might learn patience." At the end of this apprenticeship he was sent to Waseda, to the University, "where," he says, "I learned little beside boat songs from pleasure boats on the river."

In the middle of his course at Waseda University occurred events which brought ruin to the family of Ohtas. The young son of the family was smuggled out of Japan into China. In China began those experiences which *The Golden Wind* recounts. They are only a part of Ohta's strangely adventurous life. He has peddled American watches and Japanese toilet articles. He has worked on coffee plantations, in diamond mines, in gold mines. He has been guard of a chain gang in Matto Rosso. He was on the *Belgian Prince* when that ship was torpedoed in the English Channel, and was taken with other survivors to England and shipped to the United States. Over here he has worked mostly at scene painting and designing. Mr. Ohta is married—his wife is an American—and he has two children. He came to Woodstock in 1920.

The present tale of *The Golden Wind* developed out of Miss Sperry's interest in a story he told at a party. The work is a beautiful example of successful collaboration, Mr. Ohta recounting experiences as he remembered them, Miss Sperry giving them pattern and atmosphere in English words, the two artists harmonious in their standards of workmanship and their vision of the good life.

☆ ☆ ☆

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THE GOLDEN WIND

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